

**Mayor's column for
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With so much talk about disaster preparedness over the last couple months, many readers have asked me to recap what the City of Edmonds' plans are in case of a disaster. Over the years of writing my columns for the local papers, I have touched on several events that have showcased our planning efforts in disaster preparedness. Two of the most dramatic were the Nisqually earthquake of 2001 and the attacks on September 11th of the same year. On a smaller scale are large windstorms, the recent helicopter crash, and the many mock drills in which we take part yearly.

There is one constant that is present in each of those events, and it is the one constant on which we base all our disaster planning efforts: we will have an earthquake of major proportions in the Puget Sound area. We don't know when, but we do know that it will happen. So all our planning is based on that assumption. We will not have a hurricane; however, if we did, our planning would be the same as for an earthquake. In every emergency situation, the key is the planning that was put in place before the emergency actually happened.

As I mentioned, we drill often on our plans for emergencies. We have an emergency operations center (EOC) that we open and from which we base our entire decision-making. City employees carry "emergency books" in their vehicles and have them at their desks that outline their duties in an emergency situation. Some have tasks to perform throughout the city and some, myself included, report directly to the operations center. Our tasks in an emergency are not just limited to taking care of immediate problems, but also beginning work on recovery as well.

We have the cooperation of local stores from which we can obtain food and water during an emergency. But we always ask citizens to maintain a three- to four-day supply on their own in case of emergency. Also a battery-operated radio, flashlights, and—did I mention a three- to four-day supply of food and water? We also have a list of places in town where we can shelter folks who need it. Because earthquakes are more than likely going to be our nemesis, the event itself would be over quickly, and the severity will determine what the next steps are.

Many of you have asked about "evacuation" plans after watching the traffic on the freeways in the hurricane evacuations. Our evacuation plan would depend on what type of event we are "running" from. You don't have warning for earthquakes, so there would be no plan to evacuate the city. While it's a long shot, a tidal wave would affect those in low-lying areas. Any evacuation that will be necessary in Edmonds could be land-based or water-based, but the bottom line is that an evacuation is unlikely. One lesson learned from Louisiana that was quickly learned in Texas was that when the mayor said "evacuate," Texas residents did so. So if I say "go"

Once we exited city hall after the shaking had stopped during the 2001 earthquake, Fire Chief Tomberg and I set up a command post in front of city hall as we waited for aftershocks. City crews were already performing "windshield surveys." In other words, they were going to likely damaged buildings to check their safety. The fire chief and I toured the city and checked on the ferry dock, the Port, schools, and Stevens Hospital. All reports came back with little damage to report. We were fortunate. In this case, we had acted so quickly and found so little damage that we didn't see the need to open the EOC.

On September 11th, we did open the EOC, and we met throughout the day as we discussed—for the first time, but not the last—what could be targets in Edmonds and Snohomish

County. Like you, we were apprehensive about what was next. This event was difficult to plan for since it was a first for our city, not to mention our country. Since then we have gone to great lengths and great expense to prepare for terrorist events.

City staff is well trained and well drilled in emergency procedures. There are certain jobs assigned to emergencies; for instance, the fire chief is the disaster coordinator, and only the mayor can declare a local emergency. There are nine essential personnel assigned to the EOC during an emergency: disaster coordinator, mayor, police chief, and six other staff directors. Not only are we tasked with making decisions, but also with regular updates to the press and public about our actions and progress. We work with a 32-page “basic plan” for emergencies and it begins, “Our mission is to protect lives, property, and the environment.”

If you are interested in more information, please contact me and I’ll be happy to help. Your city is prepared for an emergency. Are you?