Preparing for Disasters

March 2018

How is Mukilteo more like Puerto Rico than Joplin, Missouri or Houston, Texas in a natural disaster? Since tornados (Joplin) and hurricanes (Houston) have minimal impact on the road structure, help can arrive from many directions. Islands like Puerto Rico rely on help arriving by sea and by air. Both are limited by the functionality of ports to land the aircraft and offload the ships. Mukilteo’s most likely natural disaster is an earthquake. With mountains to our east and water to the west, we are highly dependent on the north/south interstate system to move supplies. We can assume that in an earthquake there will be at least some damage to that system, restricting the ability to bring in help. We will become more like an island, dependent on the ports to bring in supplies.

The good news is that we are aware of this challenge, and Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management (DEM) is organizing their plans around these predicted islands in the county. These islands will be created by failures of infrastructure such as bridges and roads. DEM, in partnership with local emergency managers, is working to plan routes and methods to get help and supplies to the various islands after an earthquake. However, even with preparation in advance, it will take significant time to marshal everything and get it transported to where it is needed.

What does this mean for you and our police and fire resources in Mukilteo? It means that we need to be prepared to take care of each other for quite a while. How long? Planners now focus on two weeks! That means being prepared to shelter yourself until shelters can be opened and you can get to the shelter. That means being prepared with food and water until those supplies can arrive and be distributed. It also means taking care of each other, neighbor helping neighbor, until help can arrive.

For police and fire, it means that those folks on duty when the earthquake hits are taking care of business without relief for quite a while as well. The six people on duty at the fire station are it for a city of 21,000. Assuming the stations and vehicles are operable after an earthquake, our ability to move around will be determined by the amount of damage to the street network. Broken streets, downed trees and powerlines, and landslides have the potential to severely limit our range. Those emergencies we can get to will have to be prioritized. Our normal decision tree is to save lives, then property, and finally mitigate environmental damage. It is fair to assume that there will be too much of all of those issues in an earthquake, so we train on plans to work through them as quickly as possible.

What can you do to prepare? First, make a plan. Second, build a kit. Third, stay informed. DEM has produced a booklet entitled *Individually Prepared, Together Resilient*. We have free copies available at Fire Station 25, 10400 47th Pl W during office hours. We can also bring them to your meetings, be it neighborhood watch, HOA, garden club, church group, or book club. We are also hosting a class this summer entitled Map Your Neighborhood. We will provide information on the 9 steps to take immediately following a disaster and help prepare neighbors to help each other. There are three dates to choose from, May 22nd, June 20th, and July 19th from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The classes will be held at Fire Station 25. To register, contact Fire Marshal Roger Rudikoff at 425-263-8158 or rrudikoff@mukilteowa.gov.

Fire departments are in the business of handling whatever emergency is thrown at them. In the case of natural disasters, no community has enough resources to take care of all the emergencies that are created simultaneously. Take time to plan ahead.