

Major Earthquake Exercise Will Examine Vashon's Readiness



Vashon Island Fire & Rescue Welcomes National Guard

A Note from Fire Chief Hank Lipe

Nobody could ever truly be ready for an earthquake as bad as the Cascadia scenario. It will overwhelm even the best efforts of our small fire district and the many organizations and volunteers in the VashonBePrepared coalition.

But Islanders are resilient and I know we will all work together as neighbors to take care of each other as best we can until mainland help arrives. Still, a community's response to a large scale disaster is only as good as its planning and training. That's why VIFR has put so many resources into this exercise.

That's also why I'm pleased to welcome the Washington National Guard to Vashon for exercise week. All across the country, the National Guard provides humanitarian relief, responding to floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, landslides and earthquakes. They have made this earthquake exercise the main focus for their annual summer training. So, we're fortunate to have the 181st Brigade Support Battalion with us. They'll be camped at Sunrise Ridge during exercise week, in the big field behind the Health Center.



The Cascadia Rising Earthquake Exercise Scenario

On June 7th, one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history will (only hypothetically!) strike our region. It's a practice exercise but it's a vital one. We know the Cascadia fault ruptures every 300 to 500 years and the last one was in 1700, about 300 years ago. The earthquake clock is ticking.

Scientists who helped develop the scenario say coastal areas like Grays Harbor will be inundated when this magnitude 9.0 quake throws a 30 to 50 foot tsunami on unprotected shoreline. In Puget Sound, there would not be a tsunami but even at this distance from the coast, five minutes of severe shaking will injure hundreds. Here on Vashon, ferry connections to the mainland would be broken, power would be out for weeks and many buildings would be damaged. We would quickly run out of almost everything from food to medical supplies and fuel. We will need mainland help, and lots of it. And that's the main focus of practicing with the National Guard and King County Office of Emergency Management.

Your Questions Answered

We've tried to anticipate questions you may have. Please flip this page over to see a Question and Answer section. Also, during exercise week, Voice of Vashon will be broadcasting coverage of the exercise and dozens of tips you can use to keep you and your family safe after a disaster.



Thanks for Having Us

A Note from Lieutenant Colonel Kristen Derda

The Washington National Guard has spent years preparing for a Cascadia earthquake disaster, working with partners at every level to develop a plan so we can assist our communities as quickly as possible when it happens... because we all know it WILL happen.

During this exercise you will see National Guardsmen from the 181st Brigade Support around the Island with a few people arriving on the weekend of June 4th. Most of us get here on Monday, the 6th and we plan to depart the following weekend by the end of the day, June 12th.

We will be working side-by-side with local emergency management personnel to test our response capabilities. You may see some military vehicles, particularly when we move between our shore landing location at Jensen Point and the camp location in the fields at Sunrise Ridge. You will also see a few helicopter operations.

These exercises are as real-life as possible so our men and women can practice their response skills and work with all the tools we would use to support a humanitarian relief effort.

It's important to understand that the Washington National Guard provides assistance to local jurisdictions only when requested. That happens when a community exhausts all its emergency resources. The National Guard then provides people and expertise to get relief to those who need it. That's why we're training closely with our local partners so we can understand their needs in advance, and they can understand the process to request and make best use of our help.

We're excited by the challenge of this scenario and the chance to practice things that we hope we'll never have to do here on Vashon. So, as a way to give back to the community for this opportunity, our soldiers will be providing community services under supervision of the Vashon Park District, revitalizing trails at Point Robinson and cleaning up some areas at Jensen Point beach.

Thank you for inviting the National Guard into your community to exercise our response plans together.



Questions & Answers on the Cascadia Rising Earthquake Exercise

Q: Will the soldiers have guns?

A: *No, absolutely not. This is a humanitarian relief mission. The Brigade Support Battalion has no police powers and just doesn't do that sort of work.*

Q: What does a "Brigade Support Battalion" do?

A: *The 181st soldiers are logistics experts. They move tons of supplies to where they are needed and distribute them, exactly what Vashon would need if the ferries were down or working only in a limited way.*

Q: Do we really need to store food, water and medicine at home?

A: *Emphatically, yes. For this very compressed exercise the National Guard will be arriving very quickly so we can do the training in the limited time available. But in a situation as bad as a real Cascadia quake, it would take weeks for this level of help to arrive.*

Q: I heard the National Guard will be coming in a big landing craft. Won't that damage the beach at Jensen Point?

A: *The exercise had to pass an environmental assessment based on a dozen site visits including state and federal scientists, divers and aerial surveys. We don't expect significant problems that way. Also, the National Guard policy is to fix any damage to facilities and the agreement with the Vashon Park District requires that as well.*

Q: What about Sunrise Ridge? Any impact there?

A: *The same kind of agreement is in place. The 181st will fix any damage to the facilities.*

Q: Will I still be able to access the Food Bank?

A: *Yes. We've planned things so Food Bank clients will easily be able to get to the warehouse using their regular route. We met with the Food Bank's Executive Director to be sure we got it right.*

Q: What about access to the Health Center?

A: *We have been careful to avoid blocking any access to the Health Center. We met with the Health Center Manager to check our plans.*

Q: What will I hear and see at the Sunrise Ridge camp?

A: *The National Guard must train to go places where there may be no electricity and nearly 100 soldiers will be sleeping on site. Generators and lights will be going 24 hours a day. We're trying to make contact with each of the immediate neighbors about that. So far, the response has been very welcoming.*

Q: What kinds of training will take place during this exercise?

A: *The Vashon Emergency Operations Center (EOC) will be activated under the direction of Fire Chief Hank Lipe as Incident Commander. A Liaison Team from the National Guard will be posted at the EOC with direct communications to the National Guard camp at Sunrise Ridge.*

Q: Anything we'll see out in the community?

A: *There will be a food and water distribution demonstration. Plus, our Community Emergency Response Team has been practicing new Rapid Assessment procedure routes so the Incident Commander can get a handle on damage and other problems and set priorities as soon as possible after a quake. Those are just two examples.*

Q: How will injured people be helped after a big quake?

A: *Our volunteer Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) will be training on a Field Treatment Site operation designed to sustain injured until they can be taken to a hospital, which could be quite a long time with the ferries down and so many injured in the city. So, the National Guard will also be training CERT and MRC members on how to support medevac operations, including "hot load" procedures for putting patients aboard with the rotors turning to save time.*

Q: What will you do with all the food and supplies brought to the Island during the exercise?

A: *Actually, there won't be much. Most of the operations will be done in simulation, moving "ghost" pallets of needed material on hypothetical planes, trucks and barges — training on the techniques to request and track the resources.*

Q: Won't the helicopter noise affect the Sheepdog Classic?

A: *Sunrise Ridge is 1.6 miles away and the airfield north of town is even farther. Pilots have been given instructions to stay clear of the trails and all helicopter operations will be completed by end of the day on the 9th so no choppers will be flying on the final three days.*

