

## What Is Emergency Management? A Student's Perspective

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On Mar. 11, 2011, Japan was hit with a magnitude 9.0 earthquake. The subsequent tsunami impacted cities throughout the eastern part of the country, creating approximately 25 million tons of debris. Five million tons of that debris is believed to have been pushed offshore, with about 3.5 million tons sinking to the ocean floor and about 1.5 million tons floating and dispersing throughout the Pacific Ocean.

Here in Oregon, we are seeing the impacts of that tsunami earlier than most of the rest of the world. On June 6, 2012, a dock from a Japanese harbor landed on Agate Beach. Since then, we have started to see more and more of these types of activities occur up and down the west coast of North America. How should we handle this problem?

I am serving as the Oregon Sea Grant's 2013 Natural Resources Policy Fellow. I am a graduate student at the University of Oregon, pursuing a Ph.D. in media studies from the School of Journalism and Communication, after already completing a master's degree in community and regional planning from the Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management.

### Projects with Oregon OEM

For 2013, I was given the amazing opportunity to work with the Oregon Office of Emergency Management (OEM) on a couple of really important projects.

■ The first one is called the Seismic Rehabilitation Grant Program (SRGP). During the last 10 years, the Oregon Legislature has recognized seismic safety as a critical element of Oregon's disaster resiliency plan. The SRGP is a State of Oregon competitive grant program that provides funding for the seismic rehabilita-

tion of critical public buildings, particularly public schools and emergency services facilities. Public K-12 school districts, community colleges, education service districts, and universities are eligible for the grant program. For emergency services facilities, the emphasis is on first responder buildings, which includes hospital buildings with acute inpatient care facilities, fire stations, police stations, sheriff's offices, and 9-1-1 centers. The purpose of this grant is to help fund seismic retrofits to critical public buildings that are in serious need of improvements.

■ This leads me to the second project that I am working on here at OEM: the Governor's Japan Tsunami Marine Debris (JTMD) Task Force. The goal of the Governor's JTMD Task Force is to create interagency coordination throughout Oregon, the United States, and with Japan in order to mitigate the potential negative impacts of the JTMD that has been dispersed throughout the Pacific Ocean and is now reaching our coast.

### Defining the Benefits

Throughout my time here at OEM, I have been asked a number of times, "What do you want to get out of this experience?" For a while, I didn't know how to answer that question. I would go back-and-forth with a number of empty, shallow answers, such as:

■ "I want to prepare myself for the professional world."

■ "I want to learn more about emergency management."

■ "I want to network with professional emergency managers."

■ "Uh...I don't know. I want to help people."

While none of these responses are false or inaccurate, they also

don't really get at why I am so passionate about working in the field of emergency management. I chose to work in the field of emergency management because I want to teach the people in my community one very important lesson.

When we think about natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, droughts, hurricanes and tornadoes, we shouldn't just think about them as phenomena that occur on a one-time, surprise basis. Instead, we need to perceive the impacts of these types of natural disasters as the obvious results of our everyday planning and actions. We need to understand that our everyday actions have a dramatic impact on the way we experience natural disasters. Emergency management is a field that focuses on mitigating the impacts of natural disasters. Mitigation is the purpose of both of the projects that I'm working on.

### "What Do You Want to Get Out of This Experience?"

Now, when people ask me what I want to get out of my experience working for the Oregon Office of Emergency Management, I know what my response will be. I want to help people realize that the impacts of natural disasters are directly related to our everyday planning and actions. Emergency management is not a field that only focuses on response and recovery. Emergency management should be an everyday activity that involves planning, research and organization. How prepared are you to answer the question?

