

Region X

Working with Local Media to Raise Risk Awareness



THE CHALLENGE

Following the release of preliminary data, including the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) for Kitsap County, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region X held three Resilience meetings in Southwest Washington and along the Oregon Coast during the winter of 2014–2015. The goal of the Risk Mapping, Assessment, and Planning (Risk MAP) meetings was to identify and plan actions that the communities could take to mitigate risk, making them safer and stronger, and thereby more resilient, to future natural hazards. However, economic demands, overburdened local officials, and competing priorities can often make it challenging to organize a robust group of stakeholders when hosting Resilience meetings. In Kitsap County, these challenges made it difficult to hold meaningful discussions about multi-hazard events and the mitigation or resilience actions that could be taken to address them.

With an upcoming Resilience meeting in Kitsap County, the Region sought to generate local interest, attract more participation from the community, and improve messaging to deliver a more productive meeting.

THE SOLUTION

In January 2015, a story in *The New Yorker* by Kathryn Schulz titled “[The Really Big One](#)” garnered national attention; it detailed the Cascadia subduction zone and the potential for a Magnitude 9.0 earthquake off the coast of Washington, Oregon, and Northern California.

On the heels of this article, a reporter from the *Kitsap Sun*, Tristan Baurick, was working on a feature story about earthquake and tsunami risk, and how prepared various businesses are in Kitsap County, particularly in regard to the Seattle Fault. He contacted Region X for comment. While *The New Yorker* article had focused on the Cascadia subduction zone, Kitsap viewed the Seattle Fault Earthquake to be of larger concern to the community.

An annual Flood Awareness Survey conducted by FEMA repeatedly indicates that people across the country prefer to receive information about their hazards from local news sources. With this information in mind, FEMA recognized a valuable opportunity to discuss risk awareness and communicate key information through a larger platform, reaching a broad audience in the community, from elected officials, to local government staff, to residents and businesses. Regional staff shared risk assessment



The ferry to Bremerton, Washington, with the Olympic Mountains in the background. Image: Getty Images

data, including the potential impact of a Seattle Fault earthquake in Kitsap County through economic effects, functionality of life-saving infrastructure, potential injuries and fatalities, and sheltering needs. Through several interviews and conversations, the Region's message was directed at helping people use the information presented to better understand their risk and mitigate any hazards. FEMA also used the opportunity to preview its upcoming Resilience meeting and provide the reporter with information about its purpose and goals.

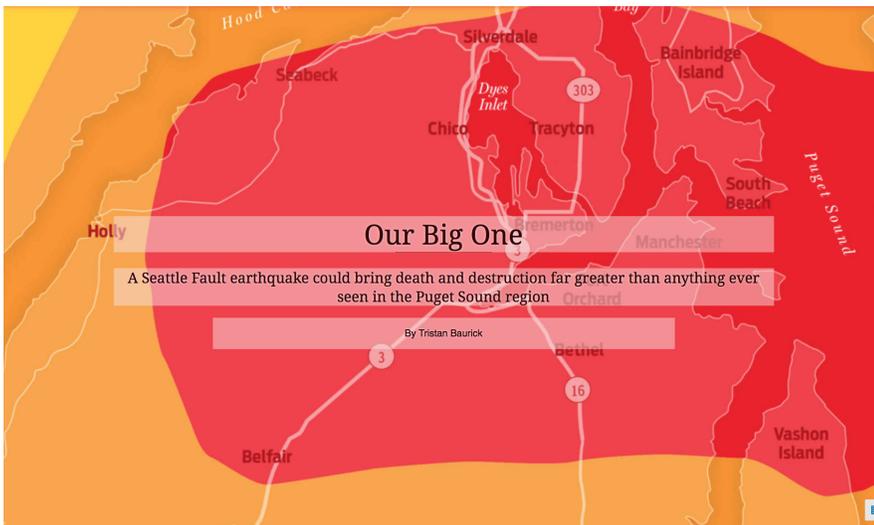
THE OUTCOME

The *Kitsap Sun* story, titled "[Our Big One](#)," was published two weeks before the planned Resilience meeting, highlighting new risk assessment information developed by FEMA, as well as quotes from Regional staff. The story also included an announcement of the Resilience meeting time and location, which caught the attention of local officials and other stakeholders. As a result, attendance by local elected officials increased. These community leaders participated in the conversation and demonstrated enthusiasm for reducing risk in their community using the FEMA-developed risk assessments. They showed interest in the Risk MAP Risk Report and were able to understand how the data provided could ultimately help their community become safer and stronger against multiple hazards, not just flood risk. Mayor Patty Lent of Bremerton proactively reached out to FEMA Region X staff after the meeting to reaffirm how informative the community found the meeting.

With active participation from more than 50 attendees (including four jurisdictions, one tribe, and observation from other federal representatives), the meeting was focused on identifying actions that would reduce risk. Participating communities were asked to come up with risk reduction strategies they could implement in their area using the information generated from the Risk MAP process.

Additionally, the Washington State Department of Ecology presented grants on Floodplains by Design, a local effort aimed at identifying and implementing multiple benefits of floodplain function. Washington Emergency Management presented information about various grant programs, including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and Flood Mitigation Assistance. Presentation information also included FEMA's Pre-Disaster Mitigation program that assists states, territories, federally recognized tribes, and local communities in implementing a sustained pre-disaster natural hazard

Kitsap Sun



From "Our Big One" by Tristan Baurick/ Used with permission from the *Kitsap Sun*.

Seattle Fault

The Seattle Fault, which runs through Kitsap County from Hood Canal to Puget Sound, is one of the region's major fault zones. Scientists have evidence an earthquake of magnitude 7 or greater that occurred 1,100 years ago generated a tsunami in Puget Sound and resulted in a 22-foot uplift of the south tip of Bainbridge Island.



NEWS

FEMA issues earthquake report, warns against 'doom and gloom'

By Tristan Baurick of the Kitsap Sun

BREMERTON — Its predictions are dire, but a report detailing Kitsap County's earthquake hazards shouldn't lead to feelings of "doom and gloom."

That was the oft-repeated message from the Federal Emergency Management Administration as it presented its risk report to county and city leaders this week. The report is based on a scenario in which the Seattle Fault, which runs under Puget Sound and across Kitsap, convulses with a 7.2-magnitude earthquake. Intense ground shaking is expected in the Bremerton and Port Orchard areas, and earthquake-triggered landslides, fires, flooding and tsunamis will cause havoc across the county.

By Tristan Baurick/ Used with permission from the Kitsap Sun.

mitigation program. Presentations also discussed earthquake mitigation activities and technical assistance through the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program. Participants learned the match required between the grant programs can be leveraged to be cost-effective for the community. As a result of this discussion, the Washington State Emergency Management Division and the Department of Ecology are now coordinating to better align grant programs to maximize investment.

Baurick, who worked with FEMA to write his story, "Our Big One," attended the Resilience meeting and published a write-up soon after, titled "[FEMA Issues Earthquake Report, Warns Against](#)

['Doom and Gloom'](#)." As a result of the meeting and local media attention, FEMA Region X staff were invited to participate in a [panel discussion](#) hosted by the Kitsap Sun, which focused on a Seattle Fault earthquake, and how individuals and businesses can remain informed about their risk and prepare accordingly. Fellow panelists included representatives from the Kitsap County Department of Emergency Management, South Kitsap Fire and Rescue, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, and a neighborhood preparedness organizer.

THE BENEFIT

By working closely with members of the local media and offering insight into hazard impacts that are a priority concern for the community, FEMA Region X was able to disseminate information more broadly. The Region engaged more local officials in community settings to facilitate conversations among stakeholders and the public. The process helped to position Regional staff as leaders and resources for risk awareness and other hazard-related information.

are now positioned to take mitigation action through either the state or FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant Program. The

State of Washington has thus far received three Pre-Disaster Mitigation grant applications from the communities attending Kitsap's Resilience meeting. With a better understanding of the impacts from a Seattle fault earthquake, two communities applied for emergency generators to maintain functionality for critical facilities following a Seattle fault earthquake, and a third community applied for a grant to develop a citizen preparedness program around tsunamis, to include signage and outreach.



Image: FEMA



FEMA

RiskMAP
Increasing Resilience Together