

Mayor committed to improving disaster services

By Bellingham Mayor Mark Asmundson

When Hurricane Katrina wrecked havoc through New Orleans, when tsunamis slammed into Indian Ocean countries, when disasters strike anywhere, responsible leaders ask themselves: "Can that happen in my community, and what should I do now to make sure we are ready if it does?"

Our community is not as prepared for disasters as we should be, and I have a professional and moral responsibility to address this problem.

A recent *Herald* article described an Emergency Management Council meeting during which this topic was discussed. It is unfortunate that the *Herald* reporter focused on conflict, rather than reporting the facts to allow various perspectives to be aired and ultimately build, rather than damage, community dialogue.

This approach is especially disturbing when people's lives are at stake.

While the *Herald's* reporter described the conflict, he did not report the important points of agreement. Every member of the Emergency Management Council agreed we need to do a better job of helping the community prepare for disasters, so when they happen, the impact is less and we recover faster.

Needs not currently being met include making our community more disaster-resistant, helping neighborhoods prepare their homes, families and businesses for emergencies, and increasing our ability to help people when tragedy strikes.

Commitment to improvement

I am proposing additional resources to address these needs to ensure that this top priority function of government serves our community responsibly.

Many have asked why City officials did not support additional staffing proposed by the County in 2004. Bellingham taxpayers do not receive good value for the money paid to Whatcom County for emergency management. Over the years, we have studied emergency management practices nation-wide and communicated our concerns to County officials. In 2004, just like today, we were concerned about priorities. I do not support providing additional County emergency staffing to write more grant applications for homeland security. I do support committing resources required to boost our emergency planning, get out into the community and help people prepare for emergencies, and help people recover from them if they occur.

I asked representatives of other Whatcom County communities if they will also commit the required resources. While they agree improvements are necessary, they have not yet determined if they can afford to do more now. Even if other elected officials are not able to devote the resources we all agree are needed, the City will continue to coordinate with the other jurisdictions.

Working together is simply the right thing to do. Accepting the status quo is not.

Commitment to working together

We have no interest in "taking our marbles and going home." I have stated repeatedly that we will coordinate closely; in fact I have offered to house a regional emergency management team in city facilities to ensure that our operations are seamless in serving people throughout Whatcom County.

At the Emergency Management Council meeting I asked if they wanted to actually improve emergency services, as opposed to just talk about 'staying together'. Togetherness makes for a great political sound bite, but it won't protect public safety and save lives.

None of this made it in the newspaper.

Commitment to public safety

We have to do something to dramatically improve disaster planning, preparedness and recovery services throughout Whatcom County. My responsibility is primarily to the citizens of Bellingham. If county officials choose business as usual, I cannot as a responsible leader, nor can I in good conscience, simply go along when I know our current efforts are sorely lacking.

My resolve comes from evaluating lessons learned and increased public expectations resulting from recent disasters, both in Bellingham and world-wide. We hope disasters never happen, but we also know that they do. I am committed to making sure we are prepared.

Bellingham Mayor Mark Asmundson is a graduate of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Management Institute in Maryland.

See concept paper on Page 3 below

Concept paper 8/1/06

City of Bellingham Emergency Management

Summary

The City evaluated its needs in better preparing our citizens, business, and government to prevent loss of life and property, respond adequately, and recover quickly after a significant disaster. This evaluation was predicated on our experiences in the Whatcom Creek incident, analysis of the events from 9/11/01, the Gulf Coast hurricanes, and our experience receiving limited services from Whatcom County Division of Emergency Management over the past ten years.

Based on this evaluation, we should:

- Better inform and educate city residents about the limited response capabilities of local, state, and federal government after a disaster.
- Improve Bellingham natural hazards land use planning and future development of urban areas, especially in the soon to be developed New Whatcom waterfront commercial/residential area.
- Integrate our robust and diverse neighborhood association resources into community disaster response planning, preparedness, and training. An “all hazards” approach, including fire safety, crime prevention, and disaster preparedness and response is the most cost effective approach to building disaster resistant neighborhoods.
- Continue our role in local and regional leadership in providing regional emergency response programs, including; Haz Mat, EMS, Fire and Law enforcement mobilization, 911 dispatch, explosive device response, and regional incident management team (IMT) development.
- Increase critical infrastructure security efforts, including aggressive pursuit of state and federal funds to ensure the safety of the water supply that provides water to over one-half of the county’s residents.
- Maximize our relationship with WWU, and better coordinate our respective disaster response needs and plans to allow for seamless integration of reciprocal resources during a local emergency.
- Better emphasize and communicate our role and responsibilities in countywide disaster response.
- Take advantage of the city government culture of emergency response readiness by improving specific disaster preparedness education,

planning, and response activities for city elected officials, department heads, supervisors, and employees. This includes providing disaster preparedness equipment incentives, discounts, and supplies as identified.

- Assist the County in efforts to improve Emergency Management activities, not only for county residents, but also to all municipal residents of the small cities. This includes; mitigation, planning, response and recovery activities.
- Maximize use of the City's GIS database and capability, especially in developing natural hazards mitigation strategies in land use planning and emergency response mapping.
- Fully implement our web based emergency communications system, using it on a regular basis by both government and citizens to share routine public safety and emergency information. This helps ensure that this system will be easily integrated into disaster information communications during a significant event.
- Consider implementation of a Public Works Department web-based "emergency contractor" self registering database, that pre-identifies contractors willing and able to provide needed materials and services during a disaster.
- Ensure ongoing and consistent new employee/elected official emergency response/disaster preparedness education to help sustain a culture of readiness and preparedness on a personal and governmental level.

The City already provides the following basic emergency management functions for city residents:

- A City EOC facility
- A web based emergency communications/information web site
- Maintains a city specific emergency operations plan
- Integrated emergency management activities using key city departments, including:
 - Human Resources
 - Information Technology Services/BTV
 - Fire/PW/BPD/Medic One/WhatComm Dispatch
 - Executive/City Council/Communications
 - Legal
 - Finance
- Regional participation in Homeland Security, 2010 Olympics planning, and regional emergency response programs.

Recommended approach

Create a City of Bellingham Emergency Management Division within the Bellingham Fire Department. This division would be initially staffed with personnel from the Fire and Police Departments, providing focused emergency management planning and education support for city employees, neighborhoods/residents, and businesses. Provide primary support to, and coordination with, Whatcom County DEM to minimize inefficient duplication of service and bolster overall county emergency management services.

This Division would consist of:

- 1 – Assistant Fire Chief
 - Oversees City EM activities/division and coordinating with Whatcom County and other agencies
 - Would also have administrative responsibility for Life Safety and Training Divisions
 - Ensures involvement of all city departments in accomplishing key EM activities specific to mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.
- 1 – Police Lieutenant
 - Coordinates and oversees Homeland Security programs and critical infrastructure security needs and all related funding activities.
 - Interfaces with regional/state/federal law enforcement agencies regarding homeland security issues, and represents the City in regional fusion center operations.
 - Supports City EM activities, including public education, regional Incident Management Team operations, planning, and exercise development/delivery.
 - Assists in the integration of PD public education/crime prevention activities into overall citizen safety and preparedness activities.
 - Coordinates neighborhood CERT education/training.
- 1 – Firefighter/public educator
 - Coordinates and delivers specific public education programs related to city emergency management and life safety programs.
 - Liaisons with PD staff related to delivery of crime prevention programs.
 - Maintains public education/safety information on the PIER web site, and other linked city web sites.
 - Provides timely disaster preparedness education, articles, and other publications to city employees, businesses and citizens.

- 1/3 time FTE – Secretary
 - Current part time fire department secretary increased to full time to support city EM efforts (may depend on location of EM office(s)).

Budget estimate 2007

Substantial! Line item budget proposal still being developed. Includes facility rental and other startup costs, including computers (laptops), vehicle, training and resource materials, training/certification courses, and associated personnel costs.

Impact on Emergency Management Council Contribution

The City recognizes the uncertainties in reconfiguring the relationship with the Emergency Management Council, and the potential negative cost impact to the small cities, especially if the County plans on maintaining or increasing the number of DEM personnel to improve county DEM services but not increase its financial contribution. To assist in this transition, the City is willing to consider a “ramp down” in the city’s financial contribution in recognition of our “in kind” contribution in increasing self sufficiency and decreased county obligation to provide a significant portion of the needed emergency management services.

Reorganization of Emergency Management Council

The City wants to continue to support the Emergency Management Council concept. However, the current agreement will need to be reconstructed to better define the services provided to and by all participating agencies. Specifically, a City EM Division would be required to provide “in kind” emergency management services to support countywide EM planning, education, and response efforts.

County DEM is required to provide certain EM functions, and others can be assumed by the City, specific to our needs. Still other functions should continue to be provided by the County to eliminate duplication of service. Below is a non-all inclusive list of current EM activities provided by both/or the city and county, and suggested future division of primary labor/responsibilities for these activities within the City. It is anticipated that the County would continue to perform all of these functions for the other jurisdictions on an as needed basis.

	COB	DEM
Emergency Planning		
ADA and Adult Care facility planning	1	1
Airport exercises / Planning		1
Business Emergency Network	1	
Business Emergency Plan for Critical Infrastructure	1	
Contingency planning	1	
Continuity of Government Plan	1	
Critical Infrastructure / Key Assets work with the state	1	
DHS Planning		1
Disaster Logistics Planning with Washington		1
Evacuation planning	1	
Fire Mobilization	1	
Flood Planning		1
Hazmat Plan Annex	1	
Health Planning Process		1
Hazard Identification and Vulnerability Assessment (HIVA)		1
Homeland Security Strategic Plan	1	
Hospital Planning Process	1	
Jurisdiction Plan update	1	
Law Enforcement Mobilization	1	
Local Homeland Security Strategy	1	
Mitigation Plan	1	
NIMS Compliance plan for all plans and procedures	1	
Recovery Plan	1	
School Mapping Project	1	
School Plans	1	
Strategic National Stockpile Logistics Plan		1
StormReady planning		1
Target List and Tech HIVA	1	
Terrorism Annex	1	
Alert and Warning		
Alert and Warning planning with state agencies: NAWAS		1
Alert and Warning planning coordination with state agencies: NWS		1
CAN community warning (training/list maintenance)	1	1
Duty Officer system and procedures 24 / 7 / 365		1
FBI Internet Warning System		1
Hotline Public Information system		1
PIER Emergency Information website	1	
Emergency Communications		
Communication Project with county customers / Medic One	1	
Emergency Alert System (EAS)/ Training / testing		1
RACES		1

Radio Cache (back up VHF, CEMNET, UHF)	1
WebEOC internet database	1
BTV information and government television information	1
Grant Management	
Citizen Corps grant	1
DHS Equipment Grants & Distribution	1
DHS ISIP and BSIR reports	1
Grant tracking state and federal	1
SLA / EMPG grant application	1
Meetings and Conferences	
Area Maritime Security Committee with Coast Guard	1
DHS Conference	1
Emergency Management Council meetings	1
Executive Briefings	1
Fire Chief's Association	1
Governors 2010 Olympics Sub Committee for Security	1
LEPC meetings	1
LEPC Workshop and WSEMA Conference	1
Pacific Northwest Economic Region meetings	1
Tests and Exercises	
DHS Exercises	1
Exercises with local, state, federal	1
Exercises: staff and Departments (design and evaluation)	1
Training and Education	
CERT Program	1
Coordinate training opportunities local, state and federal	1
DHS Training	1
EOC Training / Exercise / Maintenance	1
GIS Mapping/Hazus	1
GIS training	1
Information Officer training	1
Public Education to clubs and agencies	1
Recovery Unit training	1
Responder training to fire, law enforcement and public works	1
Web site public information	1
WMD awareness training	1
BTV information and government television information	1
Resource Management	
American Red Cross shelter database	1
Coordination with the Whatcom Volunteer Center	1
Email address database	1
Incident Management Team	1
Resource Database management for county and region	1
Volunteer Background checks	1

Volunteer claim boards		1	
Volunteer claims processing to state		1	
Volunteer Database management		1	
Volunteer ID Cards		1	
Volunteer registration with the state		1	
DEM Office Administration			
Budget planning	1		
CEM Recertification (Initial and every 5 years)			
Community Events/parades/etc..	1		
City Safety Committee Meetings	1		
Cross Border relationships		1	
DEM office administration	1		
Department of Ecology Response coordination			
Human Resource Training: DEM staff	1		
Intern Management			
Liaison with WWU	1		
Library for Plans		1	
Library for Reference material and Publications	1		
Library for videos	1		
Maintain CEM, Hazmat Tech, First Aid & BBP	1		
Mutual Aid Agreements (MAA and MOU)	1		
Red Cross Liaison	1		
Regional Homeland Security Council		1	
SERP Liaison	1		
Sheriff's Chief's meetings		1	
Sheriff's Safety Committee meetings		1	
Sheriff's Staff meetings		1	
Staff Evals	1		
Tier II Listings and files	1		
Tribal Liaison		1	
Update DEM Phonebook		1	
Vehicle maintenance and care	1		
Total areas of labor distribution	68	40	