

# PREPARING FOR AND RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES ACROSS OREGON

## Cascadia earthquake

Cascadia rising was a four-day, multi-state exercise to prepare for a 9.0 earthquake along the west coast Cascadia Subduction Zone. An earthquake of this scale will cause a large tsunami, landslides and many aftershocks in the days and weeks following. The exercise showed that the public health system in Oregon is unprepared for a catastrophic event. Our eleven coastal hospitals will be severely damaged or inoperable after a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and subsequent Tsunami, and thousands of injuries and deaths on the coast and on the west side of the state will create a huge challenge for the public health and healthcare infrastructure in Oregon.

## Public health: critical role in emergency response

From natural disasters to terrorist attacks, public health plays a key role in making sure Oregon's communities are prepared, healthy and safe. The public health system establishes community resilience and preparedness by helping people in



Oregon take necessary action before, during and after an emergency. This work requires building community partnerships, maintaining preparedness and recovery plans, and practicing response through trainings and exercises.

Emergency planning in risk-prone areas yields a measurably high return on investment. International aid agencies and federal partners have long emphasized the need for emergency preparedness to improve the speed and efficacy of disaster response, especially in risk-prone areas.

## Gaps in response

According to the [2016 public health system assessment](#), about a quarter of people in Oregon—a million people—live in an area where emergency and disaster preparedness programs are limited.

Last year was the most devastating year of wildfires in Oregon history, and there are major gaps in our public health system's ability to prepare and respond to them. The public health system has started to develop some tools for wildfires, but they are not reaching all communities in Oregon.

The 2016 assessment showed there are major gaps in outreach to our most vulnerable populations, which include the migrant farm worker community. We also have a gap in translation of outreach materials in other languages, and we lack the body of research to pinpoint the health effects of wildfire on long term issues such as asthma and other respiratory diseases.

## The solution

With additional funding, Oregon's public health system will work with the Office of Emergency Management, federal partners, local public health authorities, hospitals, emergency medical services, tribes and other partners to:

- Improve community preparedness and resiliency in Oregon, with special focus on high risk communities
- Integrate health intelligence and surveillance data into decision making processes
- Save lives in a catastrophic event

By closing the gaps in the public health system, we can ensure that a healthy life is within reach for everyone in Oregon.

Learn more at [healthoregon.org/modernization](http://healthoregon.org/modernization) or [publichealth.policy@state.or.us](mailto:publichealth.policy@state.or.us).