



Northwest Tribal Emergency Management Council

WASHINGTON STATE REGION 1 HOMELAND SECURITY

LUMMI
NOOKSACK
SAMISH
SAUK-SUIATTLE
STILLAGUMISH
SWINOMISH
TULALIP
UPPER SKAGIT
ISLAND
SAN JUAN
SKAGIT
SNOHOMISH
WHATCOM
ESCA
EVERETT
MONROE
6700 Totem Beach
Road
360-651-3295
lharvey@nwtemc.org
<http://www.nwtemc.org>

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Upper Skagit 1st Annual NW Tribal Emergency Preparedness Seminar

By Robin Carneen

NAMAPAHH First People's Radio & News

On November 3rd, 2006, as severe Fall wind and rainstorms started to roll in and pelt Washington state, several communities, including the city of Sedro Woolley, closest city to the Upper Skagit Tribe, were experiencing gale force winds, downed trees, power outages, and flood watches, which made the lights flicker at the 1st Annual NW Tribal Emergency Preparedness Seminar, that was held at the Skagit Valley Casino Resort.

Lynda Harvey, the Director of the Northwest Tribal Emergency Management Council and Chairperson for the Region I Tribal Homeland Security Council hosted the seminar alongside Lummi Tribal member Curt Russell, Homeland Security coordinator, Glenn Coil, Emergency Management coordinator and Tulalip Tribal Member Lorelei Ranney, HLS Admin Asst to the council. Together they are the key developers and planners for the NW Tribal Emergency Management Council and are leading an important and vital campaign to prepare tribes in Washington State for future emergencies and to ready them for possible terrorists activities.

As a response to a mandate from the Department of Homeland Security, the Lummi, Nooksack, Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, Stillaguamish Swinomish, Tulalip and Upper Skagit tribes have banded together to form a consortium of "readiness." Through a grant from Homeland Security, a flurry of workshops and trainings have begun to help participating tribes understand what resources are available to them during an emergency, like in the event of the historical earthquake and tsunami, that happened in the year 1700.

Just last year, during the 2005 Hurricane season, Native American tribes that stretch across the Gulf States of Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi were affected by the wrath of Hurricane Katrina. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Tunica-Biloxi Tribe, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, Chitimacha Tribe, Coushatta Tribe and the United Houma Nation represent several thousand Native Americans who were virtually devastated. They were sadly ignored by the United States relief efforts, that were slow to respond to begin with when the Hurricanes started unmercifully hammering that region. This is just a real and recent example of why tribes all across the United States need to get ready and be prepared to help their communities, in case something like this happens again.

Additionally, the terrorist attacks of Sept 11th, 2001 on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, along with incidences of bio-terrorism also pose a big fear and serve as a reminder that we are as vulnerable as anywhere on the Earth and that we should all be prepared for the worst case scenario. NWTEMC will assist participating tribes to develop comprehensive emergency-response plans that include public service announcements for radio and television, Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) for tribal members, to developing designated emergency routes on reservations.



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Several presenters and experts spoke and exchanged ideas with a dedicated room of tribal representatives, members of tribal law enforcement, representatives from FEMA and many others. A state legislative update was given by Executive Director (and Swinomish Tribal Member) Craig Bill, from the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs. He was followed up by a presentation from Jim Mullen-Director of the Emergency Management Department of Washington State, who stressed how public education was a crucial piece to being prepared to deal with an emergency or terrorist attack.

The seminar helped provide updates from National programs that some of the participants were already a part of and also provided instructions to new tribal representatives on how to apply for grants to implement a program of their own on their reservations and to take part in future trainings.

One of the symposium highlights occurred after lunch: Tribal police officers led a man out in an orange jumpsuit, who looked like the famous Unabomber, Ted Kazinsky. However, this particular handcuffed man, Fred Cowie was not a criminal, but an expert on terrorism, especially knowledgeable about bio-terrorism. Cowie gave an eye opening presentation and profiled several terrorists that many of us have heard about in the main stream media and at other training sessions. Cowie stressed a plan of action, by showing examples of explosive crime scenes and pictures of terrorists and extremists actions. He strongly recommended "first responders" to secure the area, get themselves and the public to safety and then back away from the scene. Each of the participants was given an Emergency Response Guidebook for First Responders, published by the transportation departments of both Canada and the United States. Cowie stated the guidebook was invaluable.

There were also representatives from The Washington State Department of Health, Homeland Security Region 1, Washington State Emergency Management Division, and FEMA Region X, all partnering with the NW Tribal Emergency Management Council. They provided participants with media materials like an Emergency Resource guide, a CD from Public Health having to do with the Pandemic Flu, handouts about how to prevent the spread of germs, and each received a DVD copy of the Native American story about tsunamis and earthquakes, "Run to High Ground" featuring storyteller Viola Riebe of the Hoh Tribe of Washington State.

This seminar was just a first stage of combined efforts to educate the tribes, who were initially overlooked back in 2002 when the United States Department of Homeland Security funds were initially distributed. These 40,000+ citizens within reservation boundaries, including transient populations (NWTEMC brochure) are now acknowledged as having some of the most vulnerable lands and borders in the United States. There are 29 tribes located within Washington State and for this particular seminar 27 of the 29 Tribes confirmed their attendance, which was unprecedented.

The main contact is: www.nwtemc.org, email: info@nwtemc.org. For more information about the NW Tribal Emergency Management Council and their efforts, you can also call Lynda Harvey at (360) 651-3295.

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By Lynn Thompson
Times Snohomish County Bureau

Brochure: NW Tribal Emergency Management Council



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Notes/recording: by Robin Carneen/KSVR 91.7 FM & TYRC coordinator

Websites:

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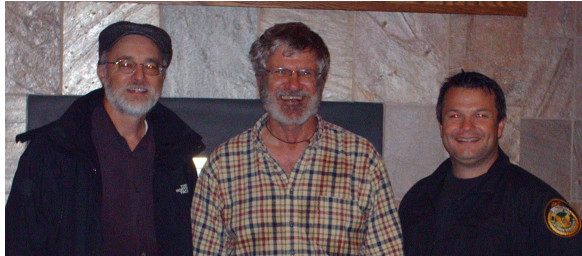


photo by Robin Carneen
Swinomish Social Services Director John Stephens
Unabomber look alike-Keynote Speaker Fred Cowie
Swinomish Tribal Police Officer Brian Geer
at the Upper Skagit Casino & Resort

Robin Carneen: 360-766-6282 or robin.carneen@gmail.com

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