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Re: Tsunami Workplace Preparedness Requirements in Oregon (NSGLC-26-04-09)¹

Date: September 10, 2026

Advisory Summary

Oregon Sea Grant requested information on workplace training requirements for hospitality and tourism professionals working at businesses located in Oregon's tsunami inundation zone. Current federal and state laws do not specifically require natural disaster safety training for these professionals, however, general labor laws provide a framework for developing Emergency Action Plans that may be used in the event of workplace emergencies, including tsunamis. State-required emergency training for other entities, such as schools, may provide a model for emergency preparedness and training standards or requirements for the hospitality and tourism industries.

This memo first evaluates federal workplace emergency preparedness standards and resources for employers. Next, the memo discusses Oregon statutes, regulations, and policies related to natural disaster preparedness. Finally, the memo looks at workplace safety training requirements in other states with high tsunami risk to identify any potential model approaches.

Background

Oregon's coast lies within the Cascadia Subduction Zone, exposing coastal hospitality and tourism businesses to earthquake and tsunami risk. An Oregon Sea Grant Coastal Hazards

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Specialist conducted surveys with hospitality and tourism professionals to assess industry needs and preparedness regarding coastal geohazards, including erosion, flooding, earthquakes, and tsunamis. The participants reported that they want to be better prepared but are wary of the burdens associated with regulatory mandates. Oregon Sea Grant requested information on workplace emergency training for private businesses operating within designated tsunami inundation zones.

Federal Workplace Safety Training

The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (OSHA) requires employers to comply with “standards” to keep workplaces free from recognized hazards.² These hazards can be man-made or natural, including emergencies caused by natural disasters. OSHA has specific standards for workplace operations in the construction and maritime industries but also includes general industry standards. Although there are no OSHA standards specifically for hospitality and tourism workplaces located in high risk areas for natural disasters, the general industry standards would apply to these businesses.

Employers subject to certain OSHA standards must develop written Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) to direct employer and worker actions during workplace emergencies.³ For example, one general industry standard requires EAPs for any employers that provide portable fire extinguishers.⁴ Workplaces in the tourism or hospitality industry generally have fire extinguishers due to fire and building codes or other laws; therefore, these businesses would be required to have an EAP, which could address safety protocols in the event of a tsunami.

EAPs must meet OSHA requirements. An EAP must be in writing, kept in the workplace, and available to employees for review; however, an employer with 10 or fewer employees may communicate the plan orally.⁵ An EAP must include required elements, including procedures for reporting and evacuation; a method to account for all employees after evacuation; and protocols for employees performing rescue or medical duties.⁶ Employers must have and maintain an employee alarm system that uses a distinctive signal for each

² 29 U.S.C. § 651 *et seq.*

³ 29 C.F.R. §1910.38.

⁴ *Id.* §1910.157.

⁵ *Id.* §1910.38(b).

⁶ *Id.* §1910.38(c).

purpose.⁷ The employer must also “designate and train employees to assist in a safe and orderly evacuation.”⁸ The plan must be reviewed with each employee at the time of hiring or when a worker’s emergency responsibilities change.⁹

As noted above, the EAPs are not required to address specific natural disasters. However, the EAP may be used for any workplace emergency and can be tailored to include procedures in the event of a tsunami. OSHA provides guidance businesses could use to develop tsunami protocols. An EAP checklist assists business owners in mapping emergency evacuation and assembly zones.¹⁰ Additionally, an OSHA Emergency Preparedness Resource Guide provides plans for natural disaster preparedness and emergency responses, including earthquakes, floods, and severe weather infrastructure failures.¹¹ Finally, the agency has an On-Site Consultation Program available to provide coastal employers with safety advice for their facilities.¹²

Oregon Requirements for Natural Disaster Preparedness for Businesses

States may develop OSHA-approved workplace safety and health plans. The plans must be at least as effective as OSHA in ensuring workplace safety and can include additional standards. Oregon has a state OSHA plan under the Oregon Safe Employment Act (OSEA).¹³ The Oregon Occupational Federal Occupational Safety and Health Division (OR-OSHA) sets state-specific workplace rules, such as standards for agriculture, construction, and hazard communication. As with the federal OSHA laws, there are no standards specifically related to the tourism or hospitality industry, but general industry standards would apply, including a requirement for EAPs in certain circumstances.¹⁴ In addition, Oregon employers must maintain operating Safety Committees or structured Safety Meetings to evaluate general hazards within the workplace.¹⁵ The committees are not required to implement tsunami-specific or other natural disaster safety or training plans.

⁷ *Id.* §1910.38(d).

⁸ *Id.* §1910.38(e).

⁹ *Id.* §1910.38(f).

¹⁰ *Evacuation Plans and Procedures eTool: Emergency Action Plan Checklist*, OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH ADMIN., <https://www.osha.gov/etools/evacuation-plans-procedures/eap/develop-implement/checklists>.

¹¹ *Emergency Preparedness Resource Guide*, OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH ADMIN., https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/resources_epr_resource_guide.pdf.

¹² *On-Site Consultation*, OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH ADMIN., <https://www.osha.gov/consultation>.

¹³ OR. REV. STAT. ANN. § 654.001 *et seq.*

¹⁴ OR. ADMIN. R. 437-002-0042

¹⁵ OR. ADMIN. R. 437-001-0765.

Related to natural disaster safety and education, Oregon requires the distribution of tsunami warning information to transient lodging facilities. The Oregon Department of Emergency Management (ODEM) and the Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI) must develop tsunami warning information and evacuation plans for distribution to transient lodging facilities, which includes hotels, motels, inns, condominiums, and public or private parks made available for transient occupancy.¹⁶ However, the law only requires the physical distribution and availability of this safety information to transient visitors.¹⁷ Employers fulfill their duty simply by making OEM and DOGAMI pamphlets or maps physically available to guests; there is no affirmative requirement on the employer to train staff, design corporate emergency plans, or conduct workforce evacuation drills. Consequently, a regulatory gap exists within Oregon law regarding mandatory preparedness for natural disasters.

Although Oregon does not impose workforce training mandates for private businesses specifically related to natural disasters, other analogous regulatory approaches in the state may warrant further examination. For example, the state requires schools to engage in emergency planning and evacuation drills for earthquakes and tsunami drills and instruction in schools in a tsunami hazard zone.¹⁸ Drills and instruction for earthquake emergencies in schools must include:

- The earthquake emergency response procedure known as “drop, cover and hold on.” A school may drill additional earthquake emergency response procedures when the school determines, based on evaluation of specific engineering and structural issues related to a building, for the most effective earthquake emergency response procedure to prevent or limit injury or loss of life.
- A requirement for immediate evacuation after an earthquake when appropriate or after a tsunami warning to protect students against inundation by tsunamis.
- At least two drills on earthquakes must be conducted each year. In schools in a tsunami hazard zone, at least three drills on earthquakes and tsunamis must be conducted each year.
- Schools are encouraged to instruct students, in an age-appropriate manner, on preparing for and recovering from natural disasters specific to the region where the school is located, including any relevant weather-related events such as

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ OR. REV. STAT. ANN. § 339.408.

flooding, drought, or excessive snowfall. The Oregon Department of Education is required to develop, in consultation with the Oregon Department of Emergency Management, guidance that may be used for the instruction and make the guidance available to schools and provide, when requested, professional development to teachers and administrators relating to the guidance.

- Units of local government and state agencies associated with emergency procedures training and planning must review emergency procedures and safeguards proposed by schools and assist schools in the instruction and drilling of students in emergency procedures.

These planning and training requirements may provide a useful model if Oregon chooses to pursue workplace preparedness requirements for hospitality and tourism businesses operating within designated tsunami inundation zones.

Washington, Hawaii, Alaska

NSGLC also looked at other tsunami-prone coastal states to determine whether they require private hospitality and tourism businesses located within designated tsunami inundation zones to provide workplace preparedness training. Like Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, and Alaska have OSHA-approved state plans. None of the three states impose workplace preparedness training requirements specifically for private-sector businesses operating within coastal tsunami hazard zones. Rather, general workplace safety regulations and voluntary emergency preparedness are used for natural disaster planning or training in the private sector.

Washington

Washington's framework related to natural disaster preparedness for workplaces is similar to Oregon's. Under the Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act, the Department of Labor and Industries, Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), enforces workplace emergency preparedness through general safety regulations rather than disaster or location-specific requirements.¹⁹ For example, when a specific administrative standard requires an EAP, it must include the same elements required by OSHA as outlined above.²⁰

¹⁹ Wash. Rev. Code Ann. § 49.17.010 *et seq.*

²⁰ WASH. ADMIN. CODE § 296-24-567.

An appendix to Washington’s state rules includes voluntary guidelines to assist employers in developing EAPs.²¹ The guidelines indicate that EAPs should address emergencies that an employer may reasonably expect in the workplace, citing floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes as examples of emergencies that may warrant inclusion in the plan.²² The guidance notes,

The use of floor plans or workplace maps which clearly show the emergency escape routes should be included in the emergency action plan. Color coding will aid employees in determining their route assignments. The employer should also develop and explain in detail what rescue and medical first aid duties are to be performed and by whom. All employees are to be told what actions they are to take in these emergency situations that the employer anticipates may occur in the workplace.

The guidance also addresses evacuation procedures. “At the time of an emergency, employees should know what type of evacuation is necessary and what their role is in carrying out the plan. In some cases where the emergency is very grave, total and immediate evacuation of all employees is necessary.”²³ Although Washington’s guidance recognizes that natural disasters are foreseeable workplace emergencies, it does not require employers to plan for any specific disaster.²⁴ Similar to Oregon, private coastal businesses can choose to incorporate specific tsunami warning signals or safety instructions into EAPs, but this is on a voluntary basis and not mandated by any state regulatory authority.

Like Oregon, Washington requires schools to provide emergency response planning and training for earthquakes and tsunamis.²⁵ Schools must have at least one safety drill each month on one of the three drill responses (shelter in place, lockdown, and evacuation). Evacuation drills in mapped lahars or tsunami hazard zones must conduct a pedestrian evacuation drill and an earthquake drill using the state-approved earthquake safety technique “drop, cover, and hold.”

²¹ *Id.* § 296-24-56701.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ WASH. REV. CODE ANN. § 28A.320.125.

Hawaii

Hawaii's occupational safety framework mirrors the federal OSHA requirements. The Hawaii Occupational Safety and Health Law (HIOSH) imposes general workplace emergency preparedness standards.²⁶ HIOSH standards require a written EAP only when a specific standard triggers that obligation, and there are no specific standards for tsunami or earthquake preparedness training based on a business's coastal location.²⁷

At the emergency management level, the state provides extensive resources through the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) and works with local governments to develop alert systems for emergency warnings. For example, HI-EMA provides workplace evacuation guidance, external checklists, such as the Red Cross Business Readiness Evaluation Tool and other Business Planning Resources, for emergencies.²⁸ HI-EMA also provides basic instruction to find tall buildings with structural steel and links the precise county information for more details in case of an emergency.²⁹

Hawaii has tsunami preparedness requirements for certain facilities. Nursing facilities must have written emergency plans for natural disasters, including tsunamis.³⁰ Adult Day Care Centers located in areas subject to tsunami action, flooding, or similar disasters must have a plan of evacuation to a place of refuge according to local civil defense regulations.³¹

Alaska

Alaska incorporates OSHA standards in state law.³² The Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Alaska Occupational Safety and Health division (AKOSH) implements the state workplace safety plan. The state does not impose any state-specific regulatory requirements for natural disaster or tsunami workforce training.

Alaska addresses disaster preparedness through voluntary guidance and public outreach initiatives administered by the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency

²⁶ HAW. REV. STAT. § 396.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Emergency Plan*, HAW. EMERGENCY MGMT. AGENCY, <https://dod.hawaii.gov/hiema/business-plan/>.

²⁹ *Types of Disasters*, HAW. EMERGENCY MGMT. AGENCY, <https://dod.hawaii.gov/hiema/types-of-disaster/>.

³⁰ HAW. CODE R. 11-94.2-58.

³¹ HAW. CODE R. 17-1424-19.

³² ALASKA STAT. ANN. § 18.60.010 *et seq.*

Management (DHS&EM). DHS&EM provides educational materials, preparedness checklists, and community outreach programs designed to encourage individuals, businesses, and local governments to prepare for earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, and other natural hazards.³³ These resources promote emergency planning and business continuity.³⁴

The regulation of childcare facilities in Alaska provides an example of workplace emergency response training in the state. Childcare facilities must provide orientation to new employees that includes information about emergency preparedness for natural disasters.³⁵ The regulations specifically include tidal waves, tsunamis, and earthquakes in the definition of “natural disaster.”³⁶ The orientation must include procedures for evacuation; staff and volunteer emergency preparedness training and practice drills; communication and reunification with families; continuity of operations; and accommodation of infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and children with chronic medical conditions.

Conclusion

Current state frameworks for addressing workplace emergencies may be used to address disaster training in the private sector. EAPs, as required by federal and state law for most workplaces, are one tool that may assist hospitality and tourism professionals to prepare for coastal geohazards, including erosion, flooding, earthquakes, and tsunamis. The mandatory elements of an EAP focus on basic, standard building evacuation logistics, such as identifying general escape routes and establishing procedures to account for personnel after evacuating. These regulations apply to all businesses subject to federal or state standards, regardless of geographic location and hazard. Workplaces in high-risk tsunami zones may tailor their EAPs to include specialized training or preparedness for tsunamis. State regulation of other facilities, such as schools, childcare centers, or nursing facilities could provide a model for regulating disaster training in Oregon’s hospitality and tourism industries.

³³ *Preparedness Training*, ALASKA DIV. OF HOMELAND SEC. & EMERGENCY MGMT., (Mar. 10, 2026), <https://ready.alaska.gov/Preparedness/Training>.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ ALASKA ADMIN. CODE TIT. 7, § 57.350.

³⁶ *Id.*