

COMMISSION POLICY 1 (Adopted 21 April 2014)

The Commission's role following a significant earthquake or tsunami

Rationale

The ASHSC is charged by the State with recommending actions that help prepare the people and infrastructure of Alaska for damaging earthquakes. This charge includes recommending efforts that mitigate seismic and tsunami hazards, highlighting necessary research and monitoring programs, and advocating for improvements that minimize losses from large earthquakes. The Commission is tasked with reviewing earthquake predictions and related warnings. Lastly, it is the Commission's responsibility to advise the governor and the legislature on seismic hazard mitigation, the budgets for those activities and, when appropriate, recommended legislation.

Though the Commission's work is ongoing, these activities are greatly heightened in the hours, days and months following a major earthquake. Commission members represent all facets of seismic hazards from research science to policy to emergency management. Following a significant earthquake or tsunami many Commission members have significant responsibilities through their respective organizations. This response plan is focused on the Commission itself. It is intended to serve as a rough guide, and a reminder, to ensure that the Commission's responsibilities rise above individual organizations and are not overlooked in the midst of a crisis. It is a set of cues, not an action plan. Every earthquake and tsunami are different and the potential role and requests to the Commission will vary greatly based on the event.

In the hours following

Summon the full Commission. Any commissioner can initiate a meeting of the Commission by contacting the chair. Following this request the chair, or designate(s), will contact commissioners directly to arrange a conference call. If the situation precludes a conference call, the chair, or designate, will decide on the next best method for establishing communication. Commissioners are encouraged to be liberal in summoning the Commission. This initial discussion does not obligate any further action unless the Commission deems it appropriate.

Brief the Commission on relevant information. As relevant, commissioners will provide information pertinent to the situation. This may include, though is not limited to, technical descriptions of the earthquake, damage estimates, continuing hazards and response activities. Special attention should be given to shortcomings and immediate needs, in keeping with the Commission's responsibilities.

Establish communication with the Governor's office. It is important that the Commission chair (or designate) make direct contact with the governor's office as soon as feasible. The Commission has an essential role to fill as an established and knowledgeable point-of-contact for facts related to the earthquake. The chair need not wait until the initial meeting to contact state government. However this person should be knowledgeable about the event and able to redirect questions before stepping forward as a point of contact.

Establish a communications plan. If additional Commission actions are appropriate, then a plan for frequent communication should be established in this first meeting. This should address when

and how the commission will follow up, as well as how agendas will be set for follow up discussions.

Consider inviting guests to Commission discussion. Select individuals may be invited to participate in the Commission's ongoing discussions. The Commission should limit participation in order to remain focused on its advocacy role and not devolve into a clearinghouse. However key individuals willing to commit time will provide perspective and additional resources in the days and weeks to come.

Consider establishing a procedure for daily talking points. Talking points are used widely in crises to help guide discussions in the media and with public officials. The Commission's diverse membership is particularly well positioned to provide talking points to respective agencies. Widely disseminated talking points allow consistent messaging and bring attention to items that require it. Talking points also establish the Commission as a trusted authority.

In the days following

Advocate immediate needs to the Governor and Legislature. The Commission has an essential role as an established state-level authority on seismic and tsunami hazards. If gross needs exist that are not being addressed, it is the Commission's highest priority to advocate for whatever resources are necessary to address the issue.

Encourage the establishment of an information clearinghouse. If a well-established mechanism does not exist, one or more Commission members, or willing outside individuals, should be tasked with pursuing and encouraging some form of earthquake clearinghouse. A clearinghouse will help ensure that pertinent and ephemeral information is archived for future understanding of the earthquake and related tsunami or other hazards.

Consider legislation to help mitigate similar events in the future. The brief period following a damaging earthquake is a rare actionable moment. The Commission's prompt efforts to inform officials and the public about smart steps moving forward will benefit the state in future crises. This is neither opportunistic nor inappropriate—it is the Commission's charge. Ideally, the Commission will have drafted concepts on the shelf that have already been vetted and can provide grab-and-go legislation.

In the weeks and months following

Promote public and official understanding of the event. As the news cycle moves on to other topics, the Commission can help keep attention on the lessons of the event. Talking points, social media, newspaper opinions, public talks, etc. are mechanisms to help ensure that the lessons of the earthquake are disseminated as broadly as possible.

Consider relevant legislation. A window of legislative opportunity extends weeks to months after a crisis. If warranted, the Commission should initiate or continue advocating for action of recommended legislative issues.