

CITY OF LOS ANGELES

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

DATE: January 10, 2013

TO: Public Safety Committee
c/o Adam Lid, Public Safety Committee Clerk
City Hall, Mail Stop 160

FROM: Geraldine Knatz, Ph.D., Executive Director
Harbor Department, Mail Stop 260



SUBJECT: PROTOCOL FOR RESPONDING TO POTENTIAL DEBRIS FROM THE TSUNAMI RESULTING FROM THE 2011 TOHOKU, JAPAN EARTHQUAKE

On July 3, 2012 the City Council adopted a motion (CF12-0879, Perry-Rosendahl) directing the Harbor Department to report on the protocol for responding to potential debris washing up along the Los Angeles coastline as a result of the tsunami that struck Japan in March 2011. The Motion instructed the Harbor Department to coordinate with the City's Department of Recreation and Parks, Fire Department, Emergency Management Department and the Bureau of Sanitation, and to address coastline areas including Venice Beach, Hyperion Treatment Facility, and the Port of Los Angeles.

Background

In March 2011, Japan was hit with a large tsunami. As a result, an estimated five million tons of debris washed into the ocean. It was estimated that approximately 70% of this debris sank near the Japanese coast. The majority of the debris field currently resides north of the Hawaiian Islands. According to estimates the debris will continue to hit the Pacific Northwest for a long period of time. The consensus by experts, is that most of the debris will remain north of Point Conception, in Northern Santa Barbara County, and that small amounts of debris could hit the shores of Los Angeles County.

Response Protocol

For debris landing in moderate amounts over time, the initial response will be the responsibility of the agency that is charged with the day-to-day management of the affected coastal area. For the majority of the Los Angeles coastline this would be the Los Angeles County Beaches and Harbors Department (BHD). Responding agencies will be responsible for gathering the debris from their areas and disposal of waste in accordance with existing procedures. Depending on the nature of the debris, other agencies may be notified and respond accordingly. Several possible contingencies are addressed below.

In the event of large amounts of debris landing over a short period of time where the demand for resources exceeds the capability of the responding agency, a multi-agency response will be initiated using standard mutual aid procedures and will follow the guidelines of the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS). Additional guidance on this type of joint agency response is provided in the Cal EMA Japan Tsunami Marine Debris Concept of Operations (attached), Section V.

Planning and Coordination

A significant amount of interagency planning and coordination has been done on this issue. The Los Angeles County Operational Area Tsunami Taskforce is in the process of developing a debris response and call-out procedures for tsunami debris. This taskforce includes representatives from the Disaster Management Area Coordinator, multiple Los Angeles County and City departments, as well as a number of other government agencies. The State of California has completed a Japan Tsunami Marine Debris Concept of Operations (JTMDCO) for the entire State. Within the Los Angeles/Long Beach port complex, the Area Maritime Security Committee (AMSC) and the Harbor Safety Committee (HSC) have received briefings on the issue and are monitoring it. The AMSC is chaired by the United States Coast Guard (USCG) Sector Commander and serves to coordinate the operations of all law enforcement and emergency response agencies that operate in the port complex. The HSC was established by the State of California Office of Spill Prevention and Response and serves to promote the safe navigation of deep draft vessels within the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports.

Roles and Missions of City Departments

Emergency Management Department (EMD) will engage in the response in the event of the landing of significant tsunami debris and/or if the response is considered a City emergency. EMD's actions would include activation of the City's Emergency Operations Center and overseeing coordination of responding City departments, as well as other agency responses. Should an emergency or disaster declaration be required, EMD would oversee the development of all proper documentation working closely with involved City departments, the Chief Accounting Office, and the Mayor's Office.

Fire Department hazardous material resources will respond to reports of marine debris on Los Angeles City property that have the potential to involve hazardous materials. They will make initial assessments to determine if an immediate hazard exists, mitigate emergent public safety issues, and make additional notifications as necessary.

Department of Recreation and Parks is responsible for management of debris removal from the areas under its jurisdiction. In the event significant amounts of tsunami debris or potentially hazardous materials land within these areas, Recreation and Parks staff will make initial assessments and request assistance from other City departments for debris handling and removal as necessary. They work collaboratively with Los Angeles County on maintenance issues (example: Ocean Front Walk, Venice Beach is managed by Department of Recreation and Parks, while the beach is managed by the County).

Department of Public Works Bureau of Sanitation is responsible for removal of debris on City property and would respond to the arrival of marine debris on any City beaches or coastal areas. It has specialized equipment and personnel to conduct high volume debris removal. Typically this response follows severe weather events or large public demonstrations. The Department of Public Works has a Debris Management Plan that was last revised in September 2012.

Harbor Department has internal capability to address debris removal within the port. It is the initial response agency for landing of tsunami debris on Port property or floating debris in waterways in and around the Harbor District. In the event debris impact exceeds Harbor Department's resources, additional resources from other departments would be requested. Additionally, Port Police maintain the capability to perform hazardous material assessments, and the Harbor Department's Environmental Management Division maintains contracts with outside commercial service providers for environmental sampling and hazardous material removal that could be used if necessary.

Los Angeles Coastline

For the purposes of this report, the Los Angeles coastline is considered to be the coastal area between Santa Monica and the Port of Los Angeles. The majority of the beaches and coastline within this area are owned and operated by Los Angeles County BHD, or owned by other agencies and managed through agreements by Los Angeles County BHD. There are four State Parks in this area; Santa Monica State Beach, Dockweiler State Park, Manhattan Beach State Park, and Redondo Beach State Park. These State beaches are operated by Los Angeles County BHD. The City of Los Angeles owns Venice Beach and Point Fermin Park beach, however Los Angeles County BHD operates these beaches. The City operates the portion of Cabrillo Beach that is inside of the Federal Breakwater. The Cities of Santa Monica and Hermosa Beach each own and operate its beaches. There are several public piers in the area which are owned and operated by their respective cities.

The Hyperion Treatment Facility is operated by the Department of Public Works. This department will be responsible for managing any impact from tsunami debris on the functioning of the plant. In the event additional resources are required, the Department of Public Works will request assistance from other City Departments.

The Port of Los Angeles is managed by the Harbor Department. Any impacts from tsunami debris will be initially responded to by the Harbor Department as described above. In the event that tsunami debris poses a potential threat to navigation, it will be the responsibility of the USCG and the United States Corps of Engineers to respond and mitigate the situation. Any threat of pollution to the waterway will be jointly responded to by the Harbor Department, State of California Office of Spill Prevention and Response, and the USCG.

Hazardous Materials

Due to the large amount of marine debris of widely varying types of materials resulting from the Japanese tsunami, it is likely that some of the debris that lands on the Los Angeles coastline will require a hazardous materials response. Examples are commercial chemical containers, gasoline cans, and propane tanks. These materials will require hazardous material assessment by a qualified emergency services/hazardous material response unit, and will need to be handled and disposed according to applicable regulations. In these situations, existing protocols will be followed that will result in a response from either the County or City Fire Departments.

Radiological Concerns

The Fukushima-Daiichi power plant incident occurred several days after the tsunami wave struck, and the debris field had already been carried far out to sea. Therefore, it is considered highly unlikely that any tsunami generated marine debris was contaminated with radiation that was emitted as a result of the damage suffered by the Fukushima Nuclear Plant. Some of the debris that has landed on the West Coast of the United States and Hawaii has been tested for radiation and no radioactive contamination was found. In the event marine debris is suspected to be contaminated, the responding agency will make appropriate notifications and requests for specialized resources. This may include a response by County or City Fire Departments and the Los Angeles County Radiation Management Department.

Invasive Species

Several pieces of tsunami debris that have landed on United States beaches have been found to be infested with various types of invasive species. In California, management of invasive species matters is the responsibility of the State Department of Fish and Game (Cal DFG). In the event of debris landings that have the potential to be carrying invasive species, the responding agency will be required to notify Cal DFG. Further details regarding invasive species are included in the JTMDCO, Section IV.

Marine Debris Tracking and Monitoring

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is responsible for tracking the movement of tsunami debris at sea, and monitoring the landings of debris on shore. NOAA has publicized instructions for local agencies and private citizens for reporting of tsunami debris landings (attached).

Public Outreach

Significant public outreach efforts have been undertaken by numerous government agencies at all levels of government. NOAA established a website specifically addressing tsunami debris tracking and removal which provides a means for reporting tsunami marine debris landings. The California Coastal Commission has issued Volunteer Debris Removal Guidelines that provides information on how debris can be safely handled and disposed, it is intended for private individuals as well as responding agencies and organizations (attached).

GK:RJB:GPC

Attachments:

- 1) State of California Cal EMA Japan Tsunami Marine Debris Concept of Operations
- 2) NOAA Japan Tsunami Debris Brochure
- 3) California Coastal Commission Japan Tsunami Marine Debris Volunteer Debris Removal Guidelines