

Clallam disaster air plan first in state

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Alan Barnard, shown with his vintage Cessna 150 aircraft at William R. Fairchild International Airport in Port Angeles, is working to develop the Disaster Airlift Response Team to help Clallam County residents in the wake of a catastrophic earthquake.

Private pilots hope to provide lifeline service after earthquakes

By ROB OLLIKAINEN
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PORT ANGELES — Private pilots will provide a lifeline to the North Olympic Peninsula after a catastrophic earthquake destroys the region's bridges and highways, emergency planners say.

Clallam County has become the first county in the state to gear up for the big one by adding a disaster airlift response plan to its comprehensive emergency management plan, officials said.

The legislative move will save lives by streamlining the general aviation response to a natural disaster, emer-

gency planners said.

"This is a huge game-changer," said Sky Terry, western regional director of the Emergency Volunteer Air Corps, in a Friday interview.

"Other counties are asking for copies of it."

Alan Barnard, Port Angeles realtor and general aviation pilot, drafted the Clallam County Disaster Airlift Response Plan that the three commissioners approved unanimously Tuesday.

The plan outlines how registered pilots in a Disaster Airlift Response Team, or DART, will transport people, supplies and equipment — and provide aerial reconnaissance — after a disaster like the magnitude-9.0 Cascadia

subduction zone earthquake that scientists predict will happen at some point.

"In a nutshell, it is an organization of private pilots who will fly their own airplanes at their own expense to assist in disaster response in times of need," Barnard said in a Thursday interview.

"It's a resource that has always been there, but only recently recognized that it could be organized and implemented."

The last major earthquake on the 800-mile long Cascadia subduction zone off the Northwest coast occurred on Jan. 26, 1700, scientists say.

TURN TO PILOTS/A5

Pilots: Volunteers offer aid in case of quake

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Geologists believe there is a 10 percent chance that another 9.0 earthquake will happen in the next 50 years.

When that happens, the North Olympic Peninsula will be divided into about 30 "micro-islands" formed by collapsed bridges and failed culverts, emergency management officials warn. Clallam County has about 20 volunteer pilots, 25 airplanes and a half-dozen ground support volunteers in its newly-designated DART program.

Jefferson County

Jefferson County has about six volunteer pilots ready to respond to a disaster, Jefferson County Emergency Management Operations Supervisor John Crooks said.

"We're still working through our process and developing our DART," Crooks said Friday.

"It's going to take more time," he added. "Everything will get there."

Crooks said he was

"Having that in place will save some lives. It's going to be a long time before the military gets here. For that initial period when we really have nothing, (pilots) will be invaluable."

PENELOPE LINTERMAN

Program coordinator

"If you have four or five DARTs, you've got your own little air force," said Terry, who is also an editor at Seaplanemagazine.

Emergency management officials say it will likely take two to four weeks for military aircraft to begin to arrive on the North Olympic Peninsula after a Cascadia-sized disaster.

Clallam County's air-lift response plan will allow trained pilots to mobilize quickly and operate safely and effectively in an actual event, according to the plan.

"Having that in place will save some lives," Clallam County Emergency Management Program Coordinator Penelope Linterman said Friday.

"It's going to be a long

it's approved, the real work begins of filling out the plan and all the components to create an effective program that will do what it's designed to do."

Terry introduced Clallam County officials to DART programs of the California Pilots Association. He was "instrumental" in the development of the Clallam County plan, Barnard said.

In exchange for basing his plan on the California model, Barnard agreed to help other counties in Washington state develop their own disaster airlift response plans.

Barnard said he would help emergency management personnel in Jefferson, Island, Kittitas and Pierce counties establish their own DARTs.

"I'm getting inquiries from all over, and I consider it a personal obligation to show up and help them," Barnard said.

California fires

In California, DARTs

were effective in the aftermath of recent forest fires and floods, Terry said.

On the East Coast and in Puerto Rico, general aviation pilots were vital in getting supplies to those affected by hurricanes, Terry added.

"We kind of fill the gaps," Terry said.

Before voting to approve the plan, Clallam County Commissioner Mark Ozias thanked Barnard and emergency management staff for developing it.

Setting the stage

"It's setting the stage for other areas of the state and will no doubt one day be crucial to the health and safety of citizens in this county," Ozias said.

William R. Fairchild International Airport in Port Angeles will be the "hub" of Clallam County emergency response activities after a natural disaster, Barnard said.

The airport, which is expected to remain opera-

tional after a major quake, will be stocked with DART equipment and supplies.

"We will be instituting operational training this summer," Barnard said.

Volunteer pilots and ground support are needed.

Ground support

Ground support personnel must be physically able to assist in loading and unloading airplanes and have an interest in helping their fellow citizens, Barnard said.

"It requires minimal training, and we'll need some from various areas around the county, anywhere that landing locations exist," Barnard said.

For information on Clallam County DART or to volunteer, contact Barnard at abarnard@olympen.com.

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