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Feds' help needed with tsunami debris, Gregoire says

Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire said Monday the state is developing a plan to address tsunami debris that washes up from Japan. But she stressed that the state will need federal help for any cleanup.

By RACHEL LA CORTE

The Associated Press



OCEAN SHORES, Grays Harbor County — Gov. Chris Gregoire on Monday announced a state plan to address tsunami debris that reaches the Washington coast from Japan but stressed that federal help is needed.

"We don't have the resources at the state level to do what we're going to have to do here," she said at a news conference at a beachside hotel in Ocean Shores.

Gregoire said she and other Western states have reached out to the federal government to let officials know that they will be seeking

financial assistance, but so far have not received a response. She said the state is working with U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell in trying to secure funds.

Gregoire noted that the state Department of Ecology has been approved to use \$100,000 from its litter-cleanup account for removal of tsunami debris. However, a "steady dribble" of tsunami debris is expected over the next few years that will require more money, though she said the cost of the cleanup is unknown.

"We are prepared to do whatever it takes to keep our beaches and our coastal communities clean and safe," she said.

Gregoire announced a "Clean Shoreline Initiative" to be led by the state's top emergency-management leader Maj. Gen. Timothy Lowenberg. The plan includes the state Health and Ecology departments and other agencies.

Gregoire said the debris is not yet at a level where she needs to call out the National Guard or seek money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

A commercial crab fisherman at the news conference told the governor that one of his vessels recently picked up 500 pounds of debris and reported it to federal officials. Larry Thevik, of Ocean Shores, said fishermen like him are concerned about the security of their fixed gear, like crab pots.

"If there's a significant amount of debris, that gear can be swept away."

Gregoire said his concerns would be addressed in the state team's plan.

Gregoire said that she expected a draft from the team within the next two weeks and is willing to look at releasing money from her emergency fund, which currently has more than \$700,000

and was last tapped to address the state's whooping-cough epidemic.

While not all of the debris washing ashore is from the tsunami, Gregoire and other state officials urged the public to report what they find to officials.

The Department of Health has been testing any items that have washed onshore for radioactivity. Last week, officials said they were testing samples taken from a 20-foot boat found beached at Cape Disappointment State Park that could be debris from the Japanese tsunami.

The Department of Ecology will screen materials that could be hazardous and is working with local governments and volunteer groups to pick up debris as needed. Gregoire said there's no reason to fear eating seafood or visiting coastal beaches. Health Secretary Mary Selecky said monitoring has found no radiation in salmon.