

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. I'm Jim Burke, with local news and commentary for Wednesday, May 10, 2023.

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A disaster the size of multiple Katrinas is building off Washington's coast. In *Politico* magazine, Sunday, May 7 is an article written by Eric Scigliano, a freelance writer in Seattle. I'm going to read you a piece of it: "On the north shore of Washington's wild Olympic Peninsula, a scimitar-shaped sandspit called Ediz Hook arcs for three miles into the Strait of Juan de Fuca. At its tip sits what may be the nation's most scenically-sited military installation – and its most vulnerable.

"U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Port Angeles is the very first of first responders when something goes wrong, as it often does, on the state's tangled straits and inlets and stormy outer coast and sometimes on the peaks and bluffs overlooking them. In 2021, they undertook 195 search-and-rescue missions. Ediz Hook is also home base for four seagoing cutters, 87 to 110 feet long, and one 210-foot medium-endurance cutter, which are often away patrolling for drug smuggling, human trafficking, illegal fishing, oil spills, and other security and environmental threats. Two 29-foot and two 45-foot short-range response boats deal with local emergencies. They joined the choppers on 16 rescue missions in 2021 and responded on their own in 23 others.

Many Coast Guard rescues are routine – boats adrift with stalled motors, empty gas tanks, or scrambled navigational equipment. Others become Discovery Channel legend. But those exploits are just a warm-up for the disaster to come. Someday – next week, next year, maybe even next century – a sudden and deadly marine shock will strike the Northwest coast: what locals call the Big One, a circa 9.0-magnitude offshore earthquake generating tsunami surges reaching 60 feet high or more. Preparations for this threat have especially lagged in Washington, says state seismologist Harold Tobin, who chairs the University of Washington's seismology and geohazards program and the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network: 'Oregon, California and British Columbia have all taken it more seriously,' says Tobin.

"Even if preparations speed up, Coast Guard rescuers will face a daunting task after the Big One strikes – assuming they survive it themselves. Semper Paratus (Always Ready) goes the Coast Guard motto. But this certain disaster of uncertain date will wash away all the Guard's preparations, along with just about everything else on Ediz Hook. Just how ready these coastal defenders are for the big wave to come is a question with life-and-death implications, for them and for those they defend.

"About 130 miles west of Ediz Hook, 70 miles past the outer coast, two slabs of planetary crust are locked in a titanic struggle. One, the offshore Juan de Fuca Plate, is what's left of a continent-sized plate that has for the past 200 million years been intermittently sliding under the larger North American Plate – an actual continent – in a process called subduction. The Cascadia Subduction Zone thus formed stretches for more than 700 miles from California's Cape Mendocino past the northern tip of Canada's Vancouver Island. According to Tobin, the fault even appears to extend under part of the Southwest Washington coast. He said, 'Some portions of Cascadia are accumulating more strain than others. It's looking more and more like the region off Washington has a more complete accumulation than Southern Oregon and Northern California.' In other words, the Washington coast is the likeliest target zero for the next megaquake and tsunami."

The article goes on to explain what researchers have learned about the Cascadia Subduction Zone since the 1980s, and why the Washington Coast and Puget Sound are particularly vulnerable should an undersea earthquake and ensuing tsunami occur any time from this moment to 200 years in the future. Read the rest of the article at <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2023/05/07/coast-guard-tsunami-00058594>.

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The weather is improving, if you like sunshine. In Seattle for the rest of this week it will be sunny and warm, and by this weekend it will be hot. Highs in the mid to upper eighties this weekend in Seattle. Here in Port Townsend and on the Quimper Peninsula we will see lots of sun, and temperatures peaking in the upper seventies this weekend, which for us out here, this might feel like a heatwave. A reminder to use sunscreen and find your sunglasses, which are underneath the seat of your car, most likely.

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KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and five Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us through [news@kptz.org](mailto:news@kptz.org). This is Jim Burke. Thank you for listening!