

Regional Water Quality Control Board  
North Coast Region  
Executive Officer's Summary Report  
February 2, 2023

**ITEM: 2**

**SUBJECT:** Update on Water Boards' Response to Humboldt County Earthquakes and North Coast Storm Events (*Mark Bare, State Water Board Emergency Management Program; and Regional Water Board Staff*)

**BOARD ACTION:** This is an informational item only. No action will be taken by the Regional Water Board.

**BACKGROUND:** On December 20, 2022, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake shook Northern California's Eureka area, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. The quake, recorded at 2:34 a.m. PT, was centered in the Pacific Ocean just off the Humboldt County coast, about 7.5 miles from the city of Ferndale. The earthquake caused minor to significant damage to residential, public, commercial structures and infrastructure, loss of power, and disruption of public services throughout coastal Humboldt County. In response to the December 20 earthquake, Governor Gavin Newsom issued a Proclamation of a State of Emergency on December 20, 2022 ([Proclamation](#)), that among other things directed the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) to provide assistance to local governments and procure materials, goods, and services necessary to quickly assist with the response to and recovery from the impacts of the earthquake. Since that Proclamation, the impacted area has experienced as many as 200 aftershocks, including a 5.4 magnitude quake on New Year's Day.

Compounding the effects of the December 20 earthquake, California has, since Christmas Day, experienced no fewer than eight atmospheric rivers — narrow but intense bands of deep tropical moisture stretching thousands of miles across the Pacific. The atmospheric rivers have dumped from 10 to over 24 inches of rainfall across the state and over 200 inches of snow in the Sierra Mountains. The storms and accompanying high winds have caused widespread damage across the state, including at least 17 deaths, structural damage to homes, road, and businesses, flooding, landslides, downed trees and power outages.

As a partnering agency with CalOES, the State Water Board's Emergency Management Program (EMP) is the first point of contact for the Water Boards for functions related to emergency management, providing inter- and intra-agency communication and coordination for the assessment of impacts to the water sector that may occur during or after an emergency event, including impacts to surface water and groundwater, drinking water and wastewater services, or environmental testing laboratories that provide analysis of water quality samples. Once an emergency has occurred that could impact water quality and/or water supply, Cal OES activates its State Operations Center and begins contacting its other partner agencies. The State and Regional Water Boards are partnering agencies.

**DISCUSSION:** Regional Water Board staff was contacted by Cal EMA on the morning of December 20 providing preliminary information about the earthquake and a list of Water Board-regulated facilities within a 50-mile radius of the earthquake epicenter that could have suffered damage as a result of the quake and may be in need of materials or assistance. Regional Water Board staff immediately began contacting representatives of the 16 listed facilities, focusing on the publicly owned treatment works considered to be most vulnerable to shaking: the Cities of Loleta, Fortuna, Ferndale and Rio Dell and the College of the Redwoods, a community college located between Loleta and Eureka. Comparable coordination and outreach has been implemented by EMP and Regional Water Board staff during the recent atmospheric river events.

In addition to outreach and coordination with municipalities and local governments and associated wastewater treatment facilities, Regional Water Board staff also engage in the oversight of emergency response measures associated with some wildfire and/or flood-related impacts, including but not limited to: (1) engagement with the U.S. Forest Service in the Burned Area Emergency Response, or BAER response, (2) support and/or review of activities associated with the CAL FIRE's Watershed Emergency Response Teams, or WERT, (3) local support and engagement with landowners, Tribes and local communities, (4) engagement with the California Office of Emergency Services through the Disaster Debris and Hazard Tree Removal program, (5) permitting of Emergency Notices of Timber Operations to support post-fire timber salvage activities, and (6) oversight of emergency dredge and fill projects in response to wildfire and flood-related impacts.

This presentation will include a description of the roles that were played by the Water Board's EMP and the Regional Water Board in responding to the Humboldt earthquake and to the recent storms, outreach efforts conducted on behalf of our water quality programs, and the impact of the December 20 earthquake on the Regional Water Board's Eureka Office and its staff. Staff will also provide a regional hydrologic update following the recent storms throughout the North Coast. In addition, staff will share information, lessons learned, and planned recovery actions associated with the July 2022 McKinney Fire and subsequent summer rainstorms that led to a massive debris flow to the Klamath River. That event serves as a warning of the severe water resource impacts that can occur resulting from natural disasters.

**RECOMMENDATION:** This is an information item only.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:** None