

## NEWS RELEASE

### **Mercer Island breaks new ground in earthquake preparedness with emergency well**



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Recent events have shown once again that disaster can strike anywhere at any time. In order to ensure water for residents following a disaster such as an earthquake, the City of Mercer Island became the first jurisdiction in Washington State to receive a "source permit" for an emergency well. The permit, authorized by the Washington State Department of Ecology, authorizes the City to use its emergency well to provide drinking water for up to 90 days or longer in the event an earthquake or other emergency disrupts the City's water supply from Seattle Public Utilities. Seattle provides all of the Island's drinking water.

"We are excited to be the pioneers in this method of securing water for our citizens," explained Mercer Island Mayor Jim Pearman. "The well represents a big step in emergency preparedness and it could not have been accomplished without the hard work and cooperation of staff and the Department of Ecology."

The emergency well was drilled to a depth of 570 feet in 2007 in Rotary Park in the center of the Island. A permanent structure around the well is currently under construction and the well will be operational in the spring of 2010. The well itself is not connected to the City's water supply system. Water from the well will be available to residents on either a walk-up basis or by water truck, depending on emergency conditions existing at the time.

Efforts by the City to secure an emergency source permit began in 2005 after new seismic studies were released showing the City's population and commercial centers are located directly over the Puget Sound fault line. At the time, there was no clear process under Washington state law for cities and other jurisdictions to apply for and receive emergency source water rights. To address this need, the City took the initiative to develop an emergency source policy with the support of the Department of Ecology. Those efforts were rewarded by the issuance of the State's new Emergency Source Policy in 2006, and the subsequent approval of the City's permit application on December 1, 2009.

With the emergency source policy now in place, cities, hospitals, and other entities throughout the state are now better positioned to plan for emergencies that disrupt the delivery of water from local and regional water systems.