



Jessica Vega Pederson
Multnomah County Chair

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Dear Governor Kotek,

I am writing today to engage your partnership in identifying a swift and meaningful public policy response to a recently identified source of extreme public safety risk. The attached report, which will be made public today, identifies a major risk from toxic inhalation hazards in Multnomah County. These dangerous airborne chemicals, if released in an uncontrolled manner, can cause immediate harm, up to and including death.

The report from Portland State University, commissioned by Multnomah County, shows the scope and scale of risk posed by toxic inhalants in our community. Seventy (70) facilities in Multnomah County store substantial amounts of toxic inhalants, so-called type II facilities. Most of those facilities are located in areas of the County subject to extreme seismic risk in the form of soil liquefaction and lateral spread. Chemicals at these facilities are stored in pre-existing non-conforming tanks that are very likely to fail during a seismic event.

When these tanks holding toxic inhalants fail, the consequences will be devastating. In the study, researchers modeled only 4 of the 70 facilities for potential releases and dispersion patterns. Even still, under the “best” case scenario we estimate over 1,200 possible asphyxiation deaths from exposure and thousands of possible injuries. This level of risk is unacceptable and unnecessary.

I am sharing the report with you so that we can work together to prepare a response – especially since I believe the response required will be regulatory. This is not a problem that can be solved with better preparation. People cannot act on their own to prepare or protect themselves. Emergency responders and facility operators will not be able to marshal a response in the face of the Cascadia subduction zone earthquake. The only prudent course of action is a public policy response that is squarely aimed at protecting public welfare through prevention.

Multnomah County is in a unique position because the majority of tier-2 facilities are in areas subject to extreme seismic impacts, but we are likely not alone in having these risks. A statewide solution utilizing the powers of state regulatory agencies is the best approach, both because the power of the governor's office and the state to act is clear, and because everyone in the state deserves to be safe from this danger.

The Cascadia subduction zone earthquake is coming. Time is not on our side. We need to act now to protect our community. I want to leave you with no doubt of my eagerness to partner, or my faith that by working together we can solve this threat with the speed and comprehensiveness it deserves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Vega Pederson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessica Vega Pederson
Multnomah County Chair