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October 14, 2009

Jeff Goltz, Chairman
Utilities and Transportation Commission
1300 South Evergreen Park Drive Southwest
Post Office Box 47250
Olympia, Washington 98504-7250

Dear  Jeff

I am pleased that the Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC) has requested that the regulated utilities serving the area below the Howard Hanson Dam provide briefings on their emergency preparedness efforts so far.

As you know, I have been working closely with our state agencies, local communities, and the federal government to ensure that we are prepared to deal with the damage and disruption that could result if flooding occurs along the Green River this winter. As I have said before, we can't stop the rain, but we can all pull together now to reduce the risks and impact of flooding.

The Army Corps of Engineers operates the Howard Hanson Dam and is closely monitoring it and the Green River. Local agencies and governments are coordinating plans for a possible flood. And we at the state are doing all we can to back up those efforts.

Last month, I asked the Corps of Engineers for materials and equipment to help improve the levees before this coming flood season. The Corps is working closely with King County, the cities in the Valley, and the state emergency managers on these short term measures. I know they are also working hard on repairing the dam, with interim repairs under way now and permanent repairs being studied. I am also working with our Congressional Delegation to ensure we have funding for these measures.

In September I issued a directive to state agencies to assist King County and to take steps to be ready. For example, our Emergency Management Division is dedicating two full-time planners to help with preparations and assist the County find needed resources. Our Departments of General Administration and Commerce are working with the County on a plan for any long-term shelter needs that might arise in case of a flood. Commerce is also working to help local businesses be ready. The Washington State Patrol and the Department of Transportation are supporting evacuation planning and are prepared to shift resources as needed if flooding hits.



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The UTC's work with regulated utilities is very important. It is imperative that the energy, pipeline, telecommunication and solid waste companies serving the area have sound emergency planning efforts under way and that they keep the Commission fully informed.


I hope you will encourage the utilities that come before you to share their plans with the public in whatever ways they can and to encourage their customers to take common sense actions as soon as possible.

- People should get flood insurance now. It can take 30 days for a policy to be effective, so people should not wait.
- Families should make their own emergency plans in the event the waters rise. They should have an emergency kit and supplies and should move valuables above ground level.
- Business owners also should make plans and share them with employees.

Steps such as these can make our communities more resilient and reduce the impact of flood damage.

Thank you again for convening the briefings by UTC-regulated utilities and pipeline companies. And thank you, too, for your agency's work assisting Major General Timothy Lowenberg of the Washington National Guard as he coordinates the state's flood preparation efforts.

Sincerely,



Christine O. Gregoire
Governor