



DNV disaster plan gets nod from UN

Mayor touts 'scientific' approach

BY JEREMY SHEPHERD, NORTH SHORE NEWS MAY 18, 2011

The District of North Vancouver is one of the masters of disaster-risk reduction, and they have the award to prove it.

The district received the United Nations Sasakawa award May 12 in Geneva, Switzerland for its disaster preparedness.

"Probably the main reason we won is because of the scientific approach we've taken to mapping risk," said Mayor Richard Walton, who accepted the prize.

"When we had a landslide with a fatality five or six years ago, that really shook our community," Walton said, referring to the 2005 Blueridge slide that destroyed two houses and resulted in the death of a 43-year-old woman.

A 2008 coroner's report said more safety measures could have been taken, and recommended that local governments work with the province to build a database of landslide risk information.

Walton said the district began doing that about three years ago, determining the risk posed to each house by a variety of disasters. That information became a Geographic Systems Information website at www.geoweb.dnv.org.

The United Nations lauded the district for the site, which allows the public to access census, land and environmental information ranging from the risk of different snow loads to the route trucks take when transporting dangerous materials through the district.

"It's probably the most advanced mapping of risk assessment of any community in the world," Walton said.

Walton also thanked the approximately 150 volunteers from across the North Shore who contribute to the North Shore Emergency Management Office.

NSEMO director Dorit Mason said she felt honoured by the recognition.

"We are really trying to make the North Shore more resilient," she said. "We plan from an all-hazards perspective."

Mason said the office uses social media as well as its website to inform people about emergency preparedness.

"I think it's really important for people to know they should be personally prepared," Mason said.

The District of North Vancouver shared the award, presented every two years, with San Francisco, Philippines and Santa Fe, Argentina.

San Francisco was awarded \$25,000. The District of North Vancouver and Santa Fe each won \$12,500.

Santa Fe and San Francisco regularly deal with natural disasters like floods and typhoons, and Walton said he was intrigued to see how efficiently the communities disseminate information during a crisis.

Walton said he was able to accept the prize because he was already scheduled to be in England.

The Sasakawa award recognizes community leaders, scientists, government and non-government organizations for their efforts to reduce natural disaster risk throughout the world.

The District of North Vancouver was one of 25 nominees for the award selected by an international panel of disaster risk reduction experts.

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