



Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human

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Subject: Provide Emergency Sanitation Instructions for Santa Cruzians

An Open Letter to Officials of the City and County of Santa Cruz,

On this occasion of [World Toilet Day](#) November 19th, we respectfully ask that you provide clear emergency sanitation instructions for Santa Cruzians given the high likelihood that water and sewer systems will be destroyed in an earthquake. Providing revised instructions will help avoid a public health debacle, and it will better prepare families in the event of long-term recovery time.

The USGS publication [Putting Down Roots in Earthquake Country](#) documents two devastating earthquakes in the Santa Cruz region. The most recent Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake was M9 in 1700, and destruction caused San Andreas Fault earthquake of M7.8 to San Francisco in 1906 is well-known. Such large earthquakes will destroy water and sewer systems. Sewer systems often take years to repair. Isn't it time to reset citizen expectations of both initial impact and recovery times?

We note both the [County of Santa Cruz Emergency Preparedness](#) and the City's [Emergency Storm Information](#) offer scant information on sanitation. Among recommended basic supplies in the [Santa Cruz Emergency Preparedness Guide](#) of the [Santa Cruz County Office of Emergency Services](#) are toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, soap, garbage bags and other sanitation supplies. Garbage bags are normally used for household solid waste not sanitary waste. In addition, the [Earthquake Supplies Checklist from the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services](#) lists among sanitation supplies "large trash cans". Mixing toilet with household waste could threaten public health particularly after a disaster that compromised transportation and trash removal. Consequently, it appears your official guidance on emergency sanitation needs is inadequate.

In contrast, the [City of Portland Bureau of Emergency Management](#) offers households simple instructions for a [Twin Bucket Emergency Toilet](#) as well as sound post-disaster sanitation guidelines. Three practical principles of ecological sanitation apply: 1) waterless containerization, 2) urine separation, and 3) long-term composting. Households have on hand 2 to 4 buckets of 5-7 gal capacity (routinely discarded by supermarkets, bakeries and restaurants). They add an inexpensive plastic seat that fits buckets. For longer term composting of human waste, please see the [Sewer Catastrophe Companion](#) prepared by our colleagues at [MDML](#) and endorsed by the city.

A large earthquake will put the burden for managing toilet needs on individual families. We strongly urge the City and County of Santa Cruz to adopt an approach that fosters household and neighborhood resilience for months or years that may be required for restoration of sewer service. To prepare families, we encourage you to adopt the [Twin Bucket Emergency Toilet](#). Awareness should come before disaster strikes and be affirmed in simple, clear, written instructions.

Warm Regards -

Organization Volunteers, Public Hygiene Lets Us Stay Human (PHLUSH)