

P U B L I C S A F E T Y

As the individual ultimately responsible to protect the public peace, health and safety within Oregon, Governor Atiyeh took special interest in keeping state and local emergency response teams in a state of readiness.

The first potential crisis arose in 1980, when Mt. St. Helens erupted across the Columbia River. Although Oregon was spared the devastation inflicted on some areas in Washington State, there were significant falls of volcanic ash at various localities in Northwest Oregon. The Governor instructed emergency response agencies to draft volcanic response plans for contingencies which might impact Oregon more directly, and to update plans covering other potential disasters. Full-scale drills, based on such possibilities as an earthquake in ~~Umatilla County~~ and an eruption of Mt. Hood, were conducted in cooperation with local emergency response agencies.

The Governor's term also saw the first approved Trojan Emergency Response Plan by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in 1982. Yearly drills have occurred both before and after 1982 to make sure that Oregonians are as well equipped as possible in case of an emergency event at the Trojan Nuclear facility.

Early in the Governor's Administration, a large ranch in Central Oregon was purchased by the followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, who came from India to establish the headquarters for his international movement. Their commune eventually grew to contain several thousand residents. Annual festivals attracted additional thousands of the Bhagwan's adherents.

It was necessary for emergency response agencies to make contingency plans which apply to any large gathering of individuals in an unusual place. Additionally, other residents of Oregon, particularly in neighboring localities, displayed increasingly hostile attitudes toward the newcomers.

As often as he could, Governor Atiyeh urged Oregonians - whatever their opinions about members of the group - not to let their feelings lead to a breach of law and order.

The Governor ordered the Attorney General to investigate the legality of the Rajneesh community and authorized a lawsuit challenging its legality on grounds that it violated the doctrine of church-and-state separation. The Governor coordinated efforts of state and local officials, and private agencies, to relieve the distress of persons who had been lured to the commune with promises of food, shelter and work, but were being expelled. He supported a program designed to prevent election fraud in Wasco County in response to fears the community would seize control through block voting.

In 1985 the movement collapsed. The Bhagwan fled, and his followers began the process of abandoning the community. The Governor's perseverance in dealing with the group through lawful means, rather than through impulsive and irrational response, avoided confrontations which could have led to loss of lives and property.

During the first year of his Administration, Governor Atiyeh expressed the view that the stockpiles of nerve gas agents stored at the Umatilla Ordnance Depot ought to be neutralized. The Governor based this not on fears for the immediate safety of nearby residents, but on his conviction that this kind of weapon no longer played a useful part in our country's defense. For a number of years, the Department of Defense opposed the Governor's urgings. More recently, however, the Department of Defense has changed its policy and now plans a program of on-site detoxification of these weapons - as originally suggested by the Governor.