

PTWC History



The era of tsunami warnings began in the United States with Thomas Jaggar's (founder of the [Hawaiian Volcano Observatory \(HVO\)](#)) attempt to warn the Hilo harbormaster of the possibility of a tsunami generated by the 1923 Kamchatka earthquake. His warning was not taken seriously, and at least one fisherman was killed.

Official tsunami warning capability in the U.S. began in 1949 as a response to the 1946 tsunami generated in the Aleutian Islands that devastated Hilo. The U.S. federal government already had a sizable piece of property in Ewa Beach to house the [Honolulu Geomagnetic Observatory](#). The Tsunami Warning Center was co-located with this facility, which is maintained by PTWC staff today.

In the aftermath of the 1960 Chilean earthquake and tsunami which devastated Chile, killed dozens in Hawai'i and perhaps as many as 200 people in Japan, the nations of the Pacific decided to coordinate efforts to prevent such loss of life from ever occurring again in the Pacific Basin due to destructive ocean-crossing tsunamis. Under the auspices of the United Nations, the [Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission \(IOC\)](#) established the [Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Pacific Tsunami Warning System \(ICG/PTWS\)](#) in 1968. The U.S. offered the Ewa Beach center as the operational headquarters for the Pacific Tsunami Warning System, and the facility was renamed the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center.

PTWC issued tsunami warnings to Alaska until 1967 when the [West Coast & Alaska Tsunami Warning Center \(WC/ATWC\)](#) was established in response to the 1964 Alaskan earthquake and tsunami. In 1982, the WC/ATWC area of responsibility was enlarged to include the issuing of tsunami warnings to California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia for potential tsunamigenic earthquakes occurring in *their* coastal areas. PTWC continued to issue tsunami warnings to these areas for *Pacific-wide* tsunamigenic sources until 1996 when that responsibility was also given to the WC/ATWC.

Following the 1975 Kalapana earthquake and tsunami on Hawai'i's Big Island, PTWC began issuing official tsunami warnings to the state of Hawai'i for local earthquakes. In 2005, PTWC similarly began issuing local tsunami warnings to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, but in June 2007 that area of responsibility passed to WC/ATWC..

PTWC was re-dedicated on December 1, 2001 as the "Richard H. Hagemeyer Pacific Tsunami Warning Center" in honor of the former [U.S. Tsunami Program](#) Manager and [National Weather Service Pacific Region](#) Director who managed PTWC for many years.

In the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, PTWC has taken on additional [areas of responsibility](#) including the [Indian Ocean](#), South China Sea, [Caribbean Sea](#), and [Puerto Rico & U.S. Virgin Islands](#) (until June 2007). PTWC's staff size has increased from 8 to 15 as a result of the tsunami, and it now staffs the center 24 hours per day everyday.

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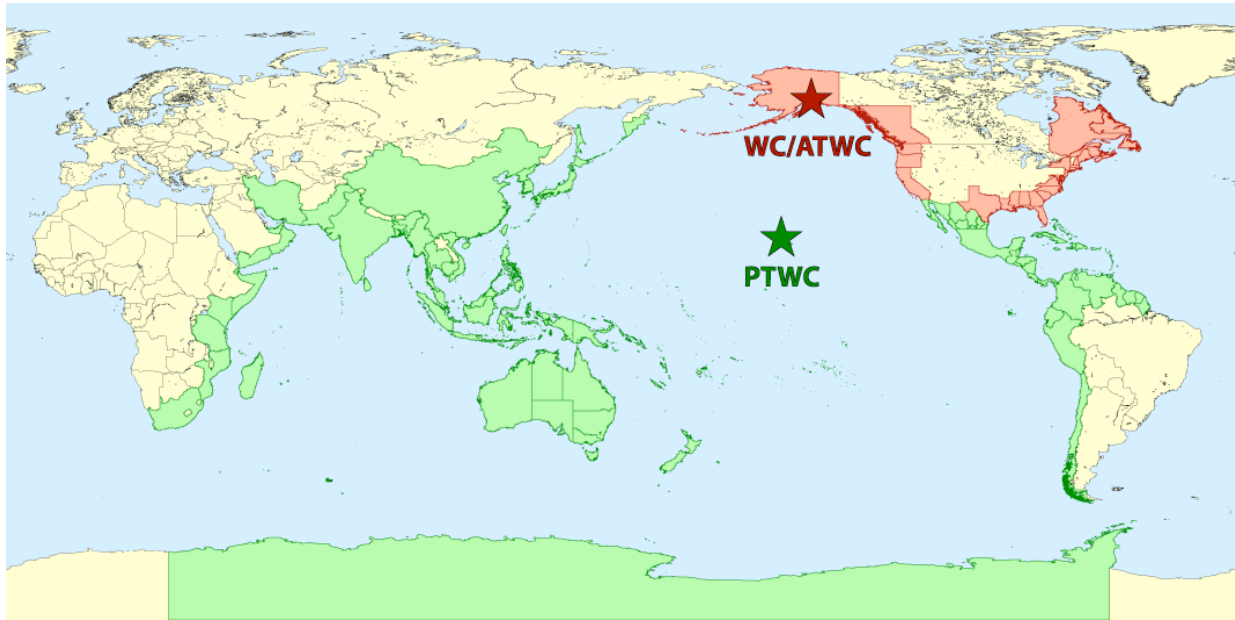
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PTWC Responsibilities

Areas of Responsibility

NOAA's two Tsunami Warning Centers ([PTWC](#) and [WC/ATWC](#)) have separate areas of responsibility, which are the geographical areas within which each Center has the responsibility for the dissemination of messages and the provision of interpretive information to emergency managers and other officials, news media, and the public. These are shown on the map below.



Pacific - International

As the primary operational headquarters for the [Pacific Tsunami Warning System](#), PTWC provides warnings for Pacific basin teletsunamis (tsunamis that can cause damage far away from their source) to almost every country around the Pacific rim and to most of the Pacific island states. This function is carried out under the auspices of the [UNESCO/IOC](#) International Coordination Group for the Pacific Tsunami Warning System. A few destructive teletsunamis are generated each century by great earthquakes around the Pacific rim. Such tsunamis can propagate across the entire Pacific in less than 24 hours, and cause widespread destruction along shorelines located thousands of miles from the source. With ever-increasing population and development along most coastlines, there is a corresponding increase in risk. The last destructive teletsunami occurred in 1964 following the great Alaska earthquake.

Pacific - U.S. Interests

As a [U.S. National Tsunami Warning Center](#), PTWC provides warnings for teletsunamis to Hawai'i, Guam, American Samoa, Wake Island, Johnston Island, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and all other U.S. interests in the Pacific located outside [WC/ATWC's](#) area of responsibility (Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, and California). PTWC serves as a backup to WC/ATWC.

Hawai'i

As the [Hawai'i Regional Tsunami Warning Center](#), PTWC provides a more rapid warning for local tsunamis generated in Hawaiian waters. Two significant local tsunamis have been generated in Hawai'i in historical times, one in 1868 and one in 1975. Both were caused by major earthquakes that displaced the sea bottom along the southeast flank of the island of Hawai'i. Although these tsunamis caused damage and casualties only on that island, a future local tsunami could have adverse effects further up the island chain. Local tsunamis strike nearby shores almost immediately after being generated by the earthquake. Consequently, the earliest warning for a local tsunami is the strong shaking of the ground, and persons near the shoreline that feel strong shaking should evacuate immediately without waiting for an official warning.

Indian Ocean

PTWC is the interim warning center for the [Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System](#).

Caribbean Sea

PTWC is the interim warning center to countries in the [Caribbean Sea](#).

Caribbean Sea - U.S. Interests

From 2005-2007, PTWC was the interim warning center to U.S. Interests (Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands) in the Caribbean Sea.

South China Sea

PTWC is the interim warning center to nations bordering the South China Sea (China, Macao, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam).

United States mainland and Canada

[WC/ATWC](#) is the primary warning center for the western and eastern coasts of the United States mainland and Canada.

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