

Home

About us

Executive Secretary, ADG
UNESCO for IOC

Officers

Meetings

IOC Worldwide

Member States

IOC Partners

High Level Objectives

Ecosystem Health

Marine Hazards

Climate Change

Enhanced Scientific
Knowledge

Sections and Programmes

Capacity Development

Ocean Observations &
Services

Ocean Sciences

Tsunami

Focus Areas

Ocean and Climate 2015
Platform

Gender Equality

Capacity Development

Global Climate Change

02.03.2017 - Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission

Honduran municipality receives "Tsunami Ready" recognition for meeting international tsunami preparedness standards



© COPECO: The Cedeño exercise tested the municipality's plans to evacuate students in case of tsunami alert

Cedeño (Honduras) has become the first municipality in Honduras to meet international requirements of preparedness and response to these natural disasters, receiving the first "Tsunami Ready" recognition on a pilot programme under the Intergovernmental Coordination Group

for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG/PTWS) of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC).

On 16 February, Cedeño inhabitants participated in its first regional [tsunami simulation exercise](#) to implement established early warning and response protocols. The activity began in the office of Honduras's Permanent Commission for Contingencies (COPECO), with the simulation of an earthquake in Ecuador that led to a tsunami alert.

The simulated alert was followed by the distribution of a Green Alert bulletin to the Local Emergency Committee (CODEL) and thereafter a Yellow Alert bulletin triggering an evacuation simulation exercise involving more than 1000 members of the Cedeño municipality as a whole, including children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Representatives of UNESCO's IOC, its International Tsunami Information Center (ITIC), and executives of the Caribbean Tsunami Warning Program (CTWP) supervised the exercise alongside experts from Guatemala, Panama, Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

Recognition

IOC granted Cedeño the "Tsunami Ready" recognition based on the successful outcome of the simulation, but also based on the development and preparation phase that preceded the exercise.

COPECO's Risk Prevention Deputy Commissioner Nelly Jerez explained that this is the first tsunami simulation to be carried out in the six Central American nations to assist regional tsunami preparedness and response efforts. The exercise followed two years of work on tsunami wave modelling, contingency plans, maps and alert protocols by staff at COPECO and the municipalities of Cedeño and Marcovia. The work has been supported financially by the U.S. Government through USAID and technically by the International Tsunami Information Center (ITIC), the Caribbean Tsunami Warning Programme (CTWP), UNESCO's IOC, the, and by various national and local partners.

The Cedeño exercise is only the beginning of a process that will lead Honduras to receive countrywide Tsunami Ready recognition. Honduran authorities are planning similar exercises for the Omoa and La Ceiba communities in coming months.

"The important thing is that the community of Cedeño has reflected what has been learned and valued what was not done well to improve," said Deputy Commissioner Jerez.

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Head of Honduras's Early Warning System (SAT), Juan José Reyes, highlighted that this pilot plan will serve as an example for the rest of Central and Latin American countries. Though tsunamis are not so frequent in Honduras, they have happened in the past and may happen again at any time, leaving the south and north coasts vulnerable, he concluded. Mr Reyes also hopes that the exercise will help villagers respond more effectively to tidal waves using tsunami prevention and rescue mechanisms.

According to historical data, Central America has experienced 49 tsunamis. Only one tsunami has ever been recorded in Honduras, on 4 August 1856.

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[Events](#)

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