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06.05.2013 - UNESCOPRESS

# Pacific tsunami warning system put to the test



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**Thirty-  
nine  
nation**

**States, territories, and commonwealths\* are taking part in an exercise that will test Pacific Rim countries' reactivity in the event of a tsunami from 1 to 14 May. Organized by the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG/PTWS), created under the aegis of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), the simulation aims to validate proposed new tsunami forecasting products of the U.S.A.'s Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC).**

The new international products, under development since 2011 and slated for adoption in 2014, include tsunami wave forecasts that will help countries improve their response capability. The enhancements are expected to reduce significantly the number of areas warned unnecessarily and to help provide advanced notice of potential local tsunamis.

Exercise Pacific Wave 2013 (PacWave13), as the test is called, simulates a tsunami warning situation requiring government decision-making regarding three scenarios for possible earthquakes occurring either off the northern coasts of Japan, the Philippines or Chile, that will generate destructive tsunamis. Each country of the Pacific is selecting one of these three scenarios for its participation in the exercise, whose outcome will be evaluated by 31 May 2013. Messages are being sent from the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre (PTWC) in Hawaii (U.S.A) and the Northwest Pacific Tsunami Advisory Centre in Japan to focal points designated in each country to respond to a threat of tsunami.

The ICG/PTWS was established in 1965 by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission following the deadly tsunami that hit the coasts of Chile, U.S.A, and Japan in 1960. The purpose of the Group is to facilitate the speedy dissemination of alerts across the region and to support countries' ability to respond to and mitigate tsunamis locally. PacWave exercises were carried out in 2006, 2008 and 2011.

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About 75% of the world's deadly tsunamis have occurred in the Pacific Ocean and connected seas. Four struck the region over the past five years: Samoa, American Samoa (U.S.A.), and Tonga were hit in 2009, Chile in 2010, Japan in 2011, and the Solomon Islands in 2013. Worldwide, an average of one or two local tsunamis have struck every year over the past century.

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*\*Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, China, Colombia, Chili, Cook Islands, Ecuador, El Salvador, Fiji, France, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Nauru, Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russian Federation, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, USA (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands) Vanuatu, Vietnam. Kuwait and Pakistan are taking part as observers.*

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