

New tsunami exercises to take place in the Pacific in the wake of World Tsunami Awareness Day

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Over 40 countries around the Pacific Rim are participating in a mock tsunami scenario which included a live tsunami exercise on 5 November, World Tsunami Awareness Day. The purpose of this Pacific-wide exercise is to test communications from the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission’s Tsunami Service Providers (TSP) in the Pacific to every country’s official tsunami warning authority. Exercise messages will be sent from the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) in Hawaii, USA, the Northwest Pacific Tsunami Advisory Center (NWPTAC) in Japan, the South China Sea Tsunami Advisory Center (SCSTAC) in China, and the developing Central America Tsunami Advisory Center (CATAC) in Nicaragua.

“We must mobilize our efforts to improve community preparedness through scientific risk assessment, regular evacuation drills and local response plans. Despite notable progress in this area, many challenges still lie ahead, as demonstrated by the two tsunamis that hit Indonesia in 2018” said Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of World Tsunami Awareness Day.

Tsunamis are no-notice, fast onset natural hazards that can cause catastrophic impacts. It is impossible to know when or where the next tsunami will hit, but we know that early warnings will save lives. For distant tsunamis, the Tsunami Service Providers provide timely alerts to country National Tsunami Warning Centres who evaluate their own tsunami threat and issue tsunami warnings to their coastal communities. And for local tsunamis, continuous education is essential so that everyone self-evacuates upon recognizing nature’s natural tsunami warnings. If people do not evacuate in time, thousands of lives will be lost and massive losses incurred that will have long lasting humanitarian, social and economic impacts.

The exercise, titled Exercise Pacific Wave 2020 (PacWave20), will ensure that the communications system to officially alert countries of the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System is working. It is the ninth such exercise with the first having been carried out in 2006, and subsequent exercises held in 2008, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018.

Featuring for PacWave20, the candidate Tsunami Service Provider Central American Tsunami Advisory Centre (CATAC), hosted by Nicaragua, will conduct the second regional tsunami drill for Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama), that will take place on 11 November 2020 at 10 am (11 am in Panama).

This exercise will simulate a strong tsunami caused by an earthquake with magnitude Mw 7.8, caused off the Gulf of Fonseca in the Pacific Ocean of Central America. This would result in a so-called “slow” earthquake that is characterized by generating little seismic shaking but large tsunamis. The disastrous tsunami of 1 September 1992 on the Pacific coast of Nicaragua and the dangerous tsunami of 26 August 2012 in El Salvador and Nicaragua had this misleading characteristic.

The exercise is sponsored by UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission through its Intergovernmental Coordination Group of the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG/PTWS).

Useful links:

[Exercise Pacific Wave 2020 information site](#)

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[Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System](#)

[Pacific Tsunami Warning Center](#)

[Northwest Pacific Tsunami Advisory Center](#)

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