

Wednesday November 9, 2011, Suva, Fiji - A Pacific wide exercise to test and improve the emergency response to tsunamis took place today with 20 Pacific Islands Countries, including Australia and New Zealand, running simulations and drills.

Known as Pacific Wave 11, the exercise asked countries to pick one of 10 regional or local tsunami scenarios to react to. The hypothetical tsunamis were created by powerful earthquakes off the shores of either Russia, Ryukyu Islands, west and east of the Philippines, Vanuatu, Tonga, Chile, Ecuador, Central America, and Aleutian Islands. Fiji, for example, is basing their scenario on a magnitude 8.9 earthquake in the Tonga trench, while Palau is basing theirs on a massive earthquake in the Philippine Trench.

After receiving the simulation warnings, authorities in the countries involved will test all the necessary steps to respond to a warning prior to informing the public. In some countries, this will be followed by coastal evacuations and other on-the-ground activities as part of an end-to-end tsunami warning and response practice.

On-the-ground activities in Fiji will include the evacuation of 20 schools located within Suva's tsunami danger zone. The exercise will involve 11,350 students and test the emergency evacuation plans of schools and emergency agencies.

Noa Tokavou, Disaster Management Advisor at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's (SPC) Applied Geoscience and Technology Division (SOPAC), said simulation exercises like Pacific Wave 11 helped countries be better prepared for such disasters.

"The exercise will further improve countries' ability to respond to an alert and improve regional coordination in the event of a tsunami," Mr Tokavou said.

SOPAC has supported Pacific Island Countries in developing tsunami response plans.

About 75 percent of the world's earthquakes and tsunamis occur in the Pacific Ocean. On average, the Pacific has a tsunami every year, with a major Pacific-wide tsunami occurring a few times each century. Three destructive and deadly tsunamis have occurred in the Pacific in the last three years: Samoa (2009), Chile (2010) and Japan in 2011.

This the third international tsunami warning exercise, the first two having occurred in 2006 and 2008.

Pacific Island countries involved in the exercise include: American Samoa, Cook Islands, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

For more information on Pacific Wave 11 got to: <http://itic.ioc-unesco.org/index.php?option=co>

Pacific Wide Drill Tests Tsunami Preparedness

Written by Administrator

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