

TYPES OF TSUNAMI NOTIFICATIONS Fact Sheet



When there is seismic activity throughout the Pacific Basin that could affect coastal communities in British Columbia, the U.S. and the Gulf of Mexico, an information bulletin is issued by the West Coast and Alaska Tsunami Warning Centre (WC/ATWC) in Palmer Alaska, an arm of the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

These tsunami bulletins are available to a wide variety of government agencies, the media and the general public directly through the WC/ATWC website and their e-mail notification system.

When the Provincial Emergency Program receives a WC/ATWC notification, emergency management staff in the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre, together with technical and scientific staff from the Canadian Hydrographic Service in the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and/or the earthquake seismologists at the Pacific Geosciences Centre in Natural Resources Canada, assess the information to determine if B.C. coastal areas may be threatened. This information is sent out to local government emergency officials through the provincial emergency notification system (PENS). The notification system speeds initial information to the places it needs to be: at the local authority level, and as well to the news media who can in turn get information out quickly to the public.

Terms that are used during dissemination of earthquake and tsunami information include:

Tsunami Warning Message: *This is the highest and most serious level of tsunami notification.* Warnings are issued when there is imminent threat of a tsunami or confirmation of a tsunami wave. When communities are issued a warning, local emergency plans should be activated and public safety actions taken. Such actions are likely to include the immediate evacuation of at-risk coastal areas and restricting access to emergency response routes and coastal beaches. Warnings are updated as conditions change.

Tsunami Advisory: *The second highest level of tsunami alert.* Advisories are issued due to the threat of a tsunami that has the potential to produce strong currents dangerous to those in or near the water. Significant inundation is not expected for areas under Advisory but coastal regions prone to damage due to strong currents may be at risk. Appropriate actions by emergency management personnel may include closing beaches

and evacuating harbours and marinas. Additionally, local officials may opt to move boats out of harbours to deep waters, if there is time to safely do so.

Tsunami *Watch* Message: This is notification based on early seismic information that provides advanced alerting to areas that could be impacted if a tsunami has been generated. When communities are issued a *Watch*, local emergency plans should be activated, and local authorities should prepare for possible evacuation in the event that their area is upgraded to a *Warning*.

Tsunami *Information* Message: This is awareness notification. Tsunami information messages may be issued based only on preliminary seismic information without confirmation of a tsunami wave. These types of messages are issued as a means of providing advance alert to areas that could be impacted by a tsunami.

Tsunami *Cancellation* Message: This cancellation message is issued when a *Warning* or *Watch* message has been issued but where damaging waves have NOT been generated.

Tsunami *All Clear* Message: This is issued when a tsunami has been generated and the threat of further tsunami is over. This message is to advise stakeholders that the tsunami event is over and no further waves are expected.

Updated Apr 28/08