

Earthquake Off Mexico Kills Dozens, Sparks Tsunami Warning

The death toll from the most powerful earthquake to hit Mexico in 100 years kept climbing Friday as rescue crews searched through the ruins of collapsed buildings in the coastal areas closest to the epicenter.

As of Friday evening, the National Emergency Committee said 58 had died in the earthquake, according to Mexico's civil defense chief Luis Felipe Puente.

Hardest hit were southern states of Chiapas and Oaxaca, but tremors from the temblor that hit just before 1 a.m. ET were felt 460 miles away in Mexico City. Thousands of pajama-clad residents fled into the streets to escape their shaking houses.

This quake, which prompted warnings of possible tsunami waves up to 10 feet high, was stronger than the 1985 tremor that killed more than 5,000 people in Mexico's capital, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto said.

But with an epicenter 40 miles off the country's coast, the first reports were that Mexico City had largely been spared.

It was a different story in Oaxaca, where Gov. Alejandro Murat reported at least 45 fatalities. More deaths were reported in the Chiapas and Tabasco states, including three children, according to officials.

One child in Tabasco was killed by a collapsing wall, the state's Gov. Arturo Nunez said. Also, a baby at a hospital died when the building lost power.

The Mexican president said there had been at least 62 aftershocks and warned his countrymen to brace themselves for one that could hit 7.2 on the Richer scale could hit in the next 24 hours.

In the immediate aftermath of the quake, more than homes and businesses lost power, Peña Nieto said. Within hours, electricity had been restored to 800,000 of them.

In Chiapas, the state closest to the offshore epicenter, there were reports some

buildings had been badly damaged. Its governor, Manuel Velasco Coello, said on Facebook that around 1,000 army troops were helping with the rescue and recovery effort.

Several towns that were in danger of being hit by the tsunami waves were evacuated, Coello said.

In Mexico City, survivors described how they were shaken awake by the quake.

"I felt the shaking and knew it was an earthquake," said Mark Van Eps, a 39-year-old musician from Los Angeles who was vacationing in Mexico City. "There was an earthquake alarm shortly after that."

"The street and buildings started swaying considerably," said Harry Neville-Towle, a 30-year-old art director visiting from Sydney, Australia. "All the cars started pulling over and people started coming out of their houses ... People were afraid to go back inside for at least an hour, as we were all unsure of whether their might be an aftershock."

Classes were canceled in Mexico City and several other states so that officials could make sure the buildings were structurally sound, the president said on Twitter.

Meanwhile, small tsunami waves of 3.3 feet washed ashore the city of Salina Cruz while 2.3-foot waves were measured at the resort town of Huatulco, according to the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center.

The Mexican government agency warned that waves of up to 10 feet could hit other parts of the country.

"We are waiting for a while to see if this is going to happen or not," Interior Secretary Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong told Mexican broadcaster Televisa.

The U.S. Geological Survey initially estimated the magnitude at 8.0 before revising it to 8.1. The Mexican Seismological Agency rated it at magnitude 8.4.

In neighboring Guatemala, President Jimmy Morales said there had been some damage and unconfirmed reports that one person had died.

Meanwhile, Mexico was bracing for another natural emergency on the other side

of the country.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center said Hurricane Katia was likely to strike the Gulf coast in the state of Veracruz early Saturday as a Category 2 storm that could bring life-threatening floods.

Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/magnitude-8-0-earthquake-hits-mexico-s-southern-coast-n799726>

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