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Little Impact Seen In Hawaiian Waters

Many Beachgoers In Waikiki Ignore Warnings

POSTED: 8:30 am HST September 29, 2009
 UPDATED: 4:40 pm HST September 29, 2009



HONOLULU -- Very little change was seen at sea level around the Hawaiian Islands on Tuesday afternoon when the earthquake near Samoa was expected to affect the state.

The [Pacific Tsunami Warning Center](#) dropped a tsunami watch for Hawaii in the morning.

While there was no large tsunami forecast for Hawaii, officials asked that people stay out of the water until 7:30 p.m.

Even though the state's top Civil Defense officials said people should not be in the water in the afternoon at the time the first wave might have arrived, the beaches of Waikiki were packed. The city's fire, police and lifeguards made a coordinated announcement to Waikiki beachgoers at 1:30 p.m., 15 minutes after the time the first wave could have made the water hazardous.

With dozens of novice surfers, children and older people on the water, the announcement caused a brief few minutes of fear as people tried to call in their relatives.

"I am not sure how to take it whether to take it seriously but I assume they wouldn't make an announcement like that if it wasn't," Australian tourist Heather Slade said.

If there was any affect of the tsunami it was not apparent on Kuhio Beach.



Workers at the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center study water levels around the South Pacific.

Scientists issued the initial watch at 8:05 a.m.

[\(Send in photos of sea-level changes.\)](#)

The quake near the Samoa Islands hit with a magnitude 8.0. It had a preliminary measurement of 7.9, officials said. It struck at about 7:48 a.m.

The seismic jolt off Samoa triggered pagers and alarms at the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center. Scientists rushed to the facility in Ewa Beach.

Information came pouring in. More than a dozen scientists were monitoring water level gauges around the Pacific, information from deep-ocean buoys and seismic data.

Scientists were on the phones constantly. The entire Pacific region was looking to them for answers.

"The hazard moves very quickly we have a very short amount of time to do

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our evaluation to get the information out to people who need it, try to protect the coast lines that are threatened," Pacific Tsunami Warning Center Director Charles McCreery said.

Hawaii was quickly put under a tsunami watch because Samoa is relatively close and the quake was so big.

Scientists from the Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory in Seattle happened to be at the center giving training in a new forecasting system. They wound up in the middle of the action, and saw just how intense things can get.

"It appears we dodged a bullet," Adjutant Gen. Robert Lee said.

After the watch was canceled the general began shifting plans for disaster recovery to Samoa. The National Guard made arrangements for cargo aircraft that could leave as soon as Wednesday.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's West Coast and Alaska Tsunami Warning Center said it was a strong earthquake but no tsunami warning, watch or advisory is in effect.

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