

## [Emergency Plan for Tsunamis](#)

The 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake killed more than 225,000 people in eleven countries and inundated coastal communities with waves up to 30 meters or 100 feet. It was one of the deadliest natural disasters in history. India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand were the hardest hit.

Tsunamis used to be the stuff of movies and until its devastation in Asia in 2004. Most people did not think it was possible for tsunamis to occur in that magnitude. After the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, people have become aware of the risk and possible consequences of this natural calamity.

What is a tsunami - Tsunamis are not caused by strong winds but by tectonic displacements (earthquakes, volcano eruptions, landslides) that occur on the seafloor. Earthquakes that produce tsunamis are those that reach 6.5 or more on the Richter scale. The average speed of the waves is 300 mph and can last from 5 minutes to an hour.

In open sea, tsunamis usually go unnoticed, having amplitudes of just 1 meter or even less. However, in some situations, waves that enter shallow water can swell to several feet and in some rare cases, rise high enough to strike coastal areas with terrible force.

Who's at risk - People who live in coastal areas located along or near the Pacific Ocean are most prone to tsunamis. This area is most vulnerable because of seismic activity in what is called the Ring of Fire. It has also occurred in Puerto Rico, Alaska, Hawaii and the Virgin Islands. What should we do in a tsunami emergency?

1. Leave the water immediately - When a strong earthquake is felt, leave the water immediately, get to shore and go as far away as you can from the beach, fast. If your location allows it, go to a higher ground. If the area you are in is mostly flat, go as far inland as you can. If you can spot the wave, you are too close to escape it, regardless of its apparent distance.

2. Tune in to your local radio station - the weather radio or turn on the TV for news and updates. They will inform you if there is a tsunami watch or warning issued in your area and where the emergency centers are.

3. Locate all members of your family and make sure everyone is informed - Agree on a place to meet in case you're not together and make sure it's safe and as far away from the shore as possible.

4. Evacuate those with special needs first - If you have family members who have special needs like elderly people, small children or infants and those with disabilities, you might want to evacuate early. You might also want to prepare your pets for moving, so bring emergency supplies for them as well.

4. Check your emergency supply kits and bring them with you - It would be a good idea if they had been regularly restocked but if not, take what you can or get what is needed if you still have the time and opportunity. Otherwise, opt to get water, food and extra clothes instead.

5. You might want to secure your house, but remember that this is the last priority - Your life and that of your family's are the most important considerations during a tsunami emergency. Expect items in your house to be swept away and if you could still secure them, do so.

Tsunami Watch vs. Tsunami Warning - A tsunami watch is different from a tsunami warning. A tsunami watch means that the presence of a dangerous tsunami is not yet confirmed or verified, although it is possible there is one. It also includes predictions on what time the tsunami is expected and where it will possibly strike.

A tsunami warning means that there is a confirmed tsunami in your area and it could be close. The warning will include the time at which the tsunami is expected and which areas are affected.

When the tsunami is about to hit you - If you find yourself under the mercy of an incoming wave, climb onto the rooftop of your house or on the highest point of the nearest structure and brace yourself. Hold on tightly to anything that's strong and stable enough. Climb a tree if you have to and don't let go.

When the tsunami has hit you - If you're already in the water, grab a floating object that can hold your weight and hold onto it until you can reach stable ground or when help is available. Grab onto anything that is firm and strive to get out of the water as much as possible. The current will be strong and there could be heavy and sharp debris in the water that could crash into you.

Tsunamis, like most things nature produces, are uncontrollable. The only advantage is that they do come with a warning, such as a strong earthquake. The only way to survive it is to be prepared, be ready to go and to keep your wits about you.

### About the Author

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