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# Japan quake - hundreds dead in Sendai

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Text Size: aA aA

FRI, 11 MAR 2011 7:07P.M.

By [3news.co.nz staff / AP](#)

A powerful tsunami spawned by the largest earthquake in Japan's recorded history slammed the eastern coast Friday, sweeping away boats, cars, homes and people as widespread fires burned out of control. Several hundred people are already confirmed dead, many of them found on a beach in the city of Sendai, closest to the epicentre.

That toll is expected to expand greatly. One Japanese news agency is reporting a cruise ship with over 100 on board has been swept away.

There was a fire at a nuclear reactor burning out of control, which is now believed to have been extinguished - but not before the evacuation of over 2000 people (scroll down for more).

The magnitude 8.9 offshore quake was followed by more than 20 aftershocks, most of them of more than magnitude 6.0. Dozens of cities and villages along a 12,100km stretch of coastline were shaken by violent tremors that reached as far away as Tokyo, hundreds of kilometres from the epicentre.

Even for a country used to earthquakes, this one was of horrific proportions. It is the fifth-strongest quake in the world since 1900, the seventh-largest in recorded history, and the largest tremor to hit quake-prone Japan in 140 years.



Houses are swept by water following a tsunami and earthquake near Japan

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The largest quake ever recorded hit Chile in 1960, measuring 9.5.

A number of tsunamis have been triggered, including one measuring 7.3 metres that hit Fukushima prefecture. The Red Cross in Geneva says the wall of water was higher than some Pacific islands.

The worst-hit area seems to be Sendai, 300km northeast of capital Tokyo. The epicentre was at sea, not too far away. A tsunami swept through the city's airport, [sweeping away cars with ease](#).

Some of the students killed in the Christchurch quake in February, studying in the CTV building, were from the northeast of Japan. Japanese search and rescue personnel will be leaving New Zealand for Japan around 3am.

There are reports of several injuries in Tokyo, hundreds of kilometres away, where buildings shook violently through the quake and the wave of massive aftershocks that followed.

A quake measuring 4.5 was measured in Hawaii, around two and a half hours following the Japan tremor.

[Watch live coverage of the disaster here.](#)

[View photos from Japan here](#)

[Footage of the quake as it happened](#)

[Japan's Parliament was in session when it hit – watch here](#)

[Cars, bridges swept away by tsunami](#)

[Who's helping out so far](#)

Officials were trying to assess possible damage from the quake but had no immediate details.

**Civil Defence is advising New Zealand coastal communities that a tsunami is possible.**

According to Civil Defence, the first wave may arrive later and may not be the largest. Waves may continue for several ho

If a tsunami has been generated people in coastal areas should:

1. Stay off beaches
2. Stay out of the water (sea, rivers and estuaries, including boating activities)
3. Do not go sightseeing
4. Share this information with family, neighbours and friends
5. Listen to the radio and/or TV for updates
6. Follow instructions of your local Civil Defence authorities.

[Read the official NZ Civil Defence warning here](#)

If Civil Defence's website is down, [their Twitter account can be found at @NZcivildefence](#).

They say there is a potential threat of a tsunami reaching New, but it has not issued an official warning yet.

"A tsunami is possible. MCDEM (Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management) and scientific advisors are assessing the severity of the threat to New Zealand," Civil Defence said.

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David Coetzee of Civil Defence spoke to 3 News a moment ago and says a potential threat does not mean the same as a warning.

Mr Coetzee says it will be around 6:23am tomorrow morning if anything hits New Zealand.

He says New Zealand is not expecting a significant tsunami or land surge but there could be a marine threat. The first wave may not be the largest.

People in coastal areas are being warned to stay off beaches, with particular focus on North Cape, the north and west and eastern parts of Northland, down to Bay of Plenty.

Mr Coetzee says for people "Not to be overly alarmed [but] be alert".

Any tsunami wave should reach New Zealand first at North Cape 6:23am, the East Cape and Auckland (west coast) at 7:23am, Gisborne at 7:29am, Milford Sound 7:47am, Wellington 7:53am, Auckland (east coast) 8:05am, New Plymouth 8:08am, Napier 8:17am, Westport 8:37am, Dunedin 9:29am, Lyttelton 10:03am, Bluff 10:20am and Nelson at 11:15am.

### **NZ sends its sympathy**

Foreign Minister Murray McCully has expressed deep concern and sympathy to the people of Japan.

"All New Zealanders are concerned to learn of this major quake which has caused extensive damage. Our thoughts are with the people of Japan at this moment as they endeavour to respond to this disaster," says Mr McCully.

"Japan has stood by our side in our time of need in the weeks following our tragedy in Christchurch. Our hearts go out to our friends in Japan."

New Zealanders with concerns about family in Japan should try to contact them directly in the first instance. If they cannot make contact and they are known to be in the northeast of Japan they should contact the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade on 0800 432 111. If calling from overseas call +64 439 8000.

Kiwi in Japan talks about experience

Kiwi David Scott is a computer consultant in Tokyo. He told 3 News it "seemed like at least five minutes". [Watch the full interview here.](#)

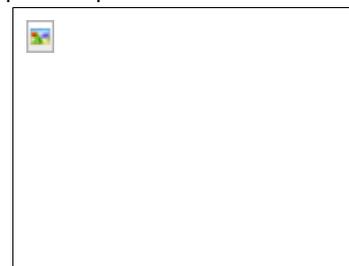
### **Moving pictures show destruction**

TV footage showed waves of muddy waters sweeping over farmland near the city of Sendai, carrying buildings, some on inland as cars attempted to drive away.

"This is a rare major quake, and damages could quickly rise by the minute," said Junichi Sawada, an official with Japan's and Disaster Management Agency.

Officials were trying to assess damage, injuries and deaths but had no immediate details. Police said at least one person killed in a house collapse in Ibaraki prefecture, just northeast of Tokyo.

A large fire erupted at the Cosmo oil refinery in Ichihara city in Chiba prefecture near Tokyo and was burning out of control.



Large fishing boats and other sea vessels rode high waves into the cities, slamming against overpasses or scraping under them, snapping power lines along the way. Upright and partially submerged vehicles were seen bobbing in the water. Ships anchored in ports crashed against each other.

### Reports of fire at nuclear plant

Japan's prime minister initially said the quake caused "major damage" in northeastern Japan, but that nuclear power facilities in the area were not damaged and there was no radiation leakage.

"The earthquake has caused major damage in broad areas in northern Japan," Naoto Kan said during an emergency news conference. "Some of the nuclear power plants in the region have automatically shut down, but there is no leakage of radioactive materials to the environment."

But a utility company in northeastern Japan has reported a fire in a turbine building of a nuclear power plant. "The earthquake has caused major damage in broad areas in northern Japan," Kan later said at a news conference.

The government's top spokesman, Yukio Edano, said that the country was sending troops to the quake-hit area to join relief efforts.

Kan also said that he has set up an emergency task force for rescue efforts.

"The government will make an all-out effort to ensure the safety of all the people and contain the damage to the minimum," Kan said.

The turbine is in a different building from the reactor. As of 2:50am (NZ time) it appeared to be out.

### Tsunamis wipe out coastal areas

Public broadcaster NHK showed footage of a large ship being swept away by the tsunami and ramming directly into a breakwater in Kesennuma city in Miyagi prefecture. Similar destruction was seen in dozens of communities along the coast.

In various locations along the coast, footage showed massive damage from the tsunami, with cars, boats and even buildings being carried along by waters.

[This image](#) shows the potential flow of tsunami waves from the epicentre.

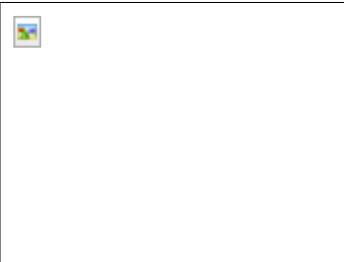
Four million homes are reportedly without power.

The BBC is reporting that five nuclear plants have been shut down.

"This is the largest earthquake known in Japan," says Australian seismologist Kevin McCue.

"There have been seven earthquakes in Japan over magnitude 8 since 1891. In 1923 in the great Kanto earthquake which measured 7.9, 147,000 people died so our expectation is that many people will be killed and there will be extensive damage. Fortunately for Tokyo it's a bit further north than the great Kanto earthquake was, which means the damage in Tokyo is likely to be much less."

Some estimates made by network NHK in Japan of the power generated by the tsunami is equivalent to 10,000 to 50,000 atomic bombs.



### Internet users talk about quake

Social networking is again playing a large role in reporting on a natural disaster, as it did in the Christchurch quake.

Twitter users such as [@ProducerMatthew](#) are posting pictures and updates as they happen. Not all of them are even in Japan, and are using tools such as YouTube and Facebook to tell their stories.

Twitter users are using the hashtags [#j\\_j\\_helpme](#) if they need help, and the self-explanatory [#tsunami](#). Kiwi Twitterers are also using [#eqjp](#), a twist on the popular [#eqnz](#) tag used for the Christchurch quakes.

Not all tweets have been useful though - [#godzilla](#) for a time was one of the most popular tags, probably in reference to the nuclear station fire.

Like they did in the aftermath of the Christchurch quake, [Google has launched a Person Finder app for Japan](#).

YouTube videos such as this one show massive cracks in roads.

Search engine Google has put tsunami alerts on its homepage, one of the most-visited sites on the internet. New Zealand is the first listed country.

### **As it happened**

The quake struck at 2:46pm and was followed by five powerful aftershocks within about an hour, the strongest measuring 8.4. The US Geological Survey upgraded the strength of the first quake to a magnitude 8.9, while Japan's meteorological agency measured it at 8.4.

The meteorological agency issued a tsunami warning for the entire Pacific coast of Japan. NHK was warning those near the coast to get to safer ground.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii said a tsunami warning was in effect for Japan, Russia, Marcus Island and Northern Marianas. A tsunami watch has been issued for Guam, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia and the US state of Hawaii.

The quake struck at a depth of 6km, about 80km off the eastern coast, the agency said. The area is 380km northeast of Tokyo.

In downtown Tokyo, large buildings shook violently and workers poured into the street for safety. TV footage showed a large building on fire and billowing smoke in the Odaiba district of Tokyo.

In central Tokyo, trains were stopped and passengers walked along the tracks to platforms. NHK said more than 4 million buildings without power in Tokyo and its suburbs.

The ceiling in Kudan Kaikan, a large hall in Tokyo, collapsed, injuring an unknown number of people, NHK said.

Osamu Akiya, 46, was working in Tokyo at his office in a trading company when the quake hit.

It sent bookshelves and computers crashing to the floor, and cracks appeared in the walls.

"I've been through many earthquakes, but I've never felt anything like this," he said. "I don't know if we'll be able to get home tonight."

Footage on NHK from their Sendai office showed employees stumbling around and books and papers crashing from desks. It also showed a glass shelter at a bus stop in Tokyo completely smashed by the quake and a weeping woman nearby being comforted by another woman.

Several quakes had hit the same region in recent days, including a 7.3 magnitude one on Wednesday.

Thirty minutes after the quake, tall buildings were still swaying in Tokyo and mobile phone networks were not working. Japan's Coast Guard has set up a task force and officials are standing by for emergency contingencies, Coast Guard officer Yosuke Oi said.

"I'm afraid we'll soon find out about damages, since the quake was so strong," he said.

The tsunami roared over embankments in Sendai city, washing cars, houses and farm equipment inland before reversing directions and carrying them out to sea. Flames shot from some of the houses, probably because of burst gas pipes.

In Tokyo, hundreds of people were evacuated from Shinjuku station, the world's busiest, to a nearby park. Trains were halted.

Tokyo's main airport was closed. A large section of the ceiling at the 1-year-old airport at Ibaraki, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) northeast of Tokyo, fell to the floor with a powerful crash.

TV announcers urged viewers near the shore to move to strong concrete buildings and stay above the third floor.

Dozens of fires were reported in northern prefectures of Fukushima, Sendai, Iwate and Ibaraki. Houses collapsing and landslides were also reported in Miyagi.

### **Russians evacuate islands**

Russian authorities on Friday evacuated some 11,000 residents from the Pacific Islands.

The regional emergency officials said that the tsunami could hit several coastal towns and villages on four Pacific islands, which the Soviet Union seized from Japan in the final days of the World War II. The islands lie as close as 10km to Japan's Hokkaido island.

Authorities on the Kamchatka Peninsula further north said the tsunami posed no danger to the area.

Kamchatka, which juts into the Pacific, is studded with active volcanoes, some of which were spewing gases to a height of 5,800 meters Friday, prompting authorities to issue warnings to planes in the area. Kamchatka volcanoes are part of the "Ring of Fire" string of volcanoes encircling the Pacific.

### **Tsunami advisories, warnings across the Pacific**

Officials say a tsunami watch has been issued for the entire western coast of the United States and Canada from the Mexican border to Chignik Bay in Alaska.

The Tsunami Warning Centre in Alaska issued the watch after a massive earthquake hit Japan.

The watch alert came after the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Hawaii issued a tsunami warning for a large swath of the Pacific including Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, Guam, Mexico and Central and South America.

Tsunami watches are issued as an advance alert to areas that could be impacted by a tsunami. Tsunami warnings are issued due to the imminent threat of a tsunami.

### **What caused the quake?**

According to the USGS, it "occurred as a result of thrust faulting on or near the subduction zone interface plate boundary between the Pacific and North America plates". [Read more here.](#)

Japan's worst previous quake was in 1923 in Kanto, an 8.3-magnitude temblor that killed 143,000 people. A 7.2-magnitude quake in Kobe city in 1996 killed 6,400 people.

Japan lies on the 'Ring of Fire' - an arc of earthquake and volcanic zones stretching around the Pacific where about 90 percent of the world's quakes occur, including the one that triggered the December 26, 2004, Indian Ocean tsunami that killed an estimated 230,000 people in 12 nations. A magnitude-8.8 temblor that shook central Chile last February also generated a tsunami and killed 524 people.

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### **Bhavin**

12 MAR 2011 1:29A.M.

god blees to japan

### **Nick**

12 MAR 2011 12:54A.M.

There is no fire at a nuclear power plant is it in fact an oil refinery. The implications are vastly different. Change the title immediately!

### **shane**

12 MAR 2011 12:42A.M.

i pray for all those people who have to face this...

### **kaitlyn**

11 MAR 2011 10:33P.M.

Hi there are you ok people

---

**cherryl**

11 MAR 2011 9:58P.M.

im very much shock after i heard the news about tsunami and earthquake in japan..! we should be pray to those people who died!!

---

**Jessica**

11 MAR 2011 9:25P.M.

I am scared I am only 12, this is too scary!

---

**Sue Nami**

11 MAR 2011 9:16P.M.

CIVIL DEFENCE website is down. Really useful. Awesome. Thank heavens for Radio National.

---

**Mark Burgess**

11 MAR 2011 9:08P.M.

This is just horrid I hope we will be giving Japan as much of our support as possible including a U.S.A.R team. This is truly the time we can repay our gratitude for all the help that Chch got from them.

---

**Anna**

11 MAR 2011 8:56P.M.

i'm really pissed off that you stopped the reports of the earthquake for the episode of glee but then stop the show 3/4 the way through to show images that you could've shown in 15 minutes after the show had finished and its not even that interesting!!!! not happy.

---

**danny**

11 MAR 2011 8:56P.M.

Civil Defence website broken. Not very good in a possible emergency. Have we not learned anything from christchurch

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