



Tsunami Safety Rules

The word "tsunami" is Japanese and means 'harbor wave,' because of the devastating effects these waves have had on low-lying coastal communities. Tsunamis are often incorrectly referred to as tidal waves, but a tsunami is actually a series of waves that can travel at speeds averaging 450 (and up to 600) miles per hour in the open ocean. In the open ocean, tsunamis would not be felt by ships because the wavelength would be hundreds of miles long, with an amplitude of only a few feet. This would also make them unnoticeable from the air. As the waves approach the coast, their speed decreases and their amplitude increases. Unusual wave heights have been known to be over 100 feet high. However, waves that are 10 to 20 feet high can be very destructive and cause many deaths or injuries.

1. All earthquakes do not cause tsunamis, but many do. When you hear that an earthquake has occurred, stand by for a tsunami emergency message.
2. An earthquake in your area is one of nature's tsunami warning signals. Do not stay in low-lying coastal areas after a strong earthquake has been felt.
3. Tsunamis are sometimes preceded by a noticeable fall in sea level as the ocean retreats seaward exposing the seafloor. A roar like an oncoming train may sometimes be heard as the tsunami wave rushes toward the shore. These are also nature's tsunami warning signals.
4. A tsunami is not a single wave, but a series of waves. Stay out of danger areas until an "all-clear" is issued by competent authority.
5. A small tsunami at one point on the shore can be extremely large a few kilometers away. Don't let the modest size of one make you lose respect for all.
6. All warnings to the public must be taken very seriously, even if some are for non-destructive events. The tsunami of May 1960 killed 61 people in Hilo, Hawaii because some thought it was just another false alarm.
7. All tsunamis like hurricanes are potentially dangerous, even though they may not damage every coastline they strike.
8. Never go down to the shore to watch for a tsunami. When you can see the wave you are too close to escape it. Never try to surf a tsunami; most tsunamis are like flash flood full of debris and they do not curl or break like surfing waves.
9. Sooner or later, tsunamis visit every coastline in the Pacific and other oceans. If you live in any coastal area, be prepared and know nature's tsunami warning signs.
10. During a tsunami emergency, your local civil defense, police, and other emergency organizations will try to save your life. Give them your fullest cooperation.

Adapted the International Tsunami Information Center at www.tsunamiwave.info/