

Beat: Miscellaneous

UPDATE1 -- Powerful earthquake strikes off Indonesia, tsunami warning issued

-, 15.11.2014, 04:00 Time

USPA News - A powerful earthquake struck the Molucca Sea off the Indonesian island of Sulawesi on Saturday morning, prompting a tsunami warning for local coastlines, seismologists said. There was no immediate word on damage or casualties.

The 7.3-magnitude earthquake at 9:31 a.m. local time (0231 GMT) was centered in the Molucca Sea about 155 kilometers (96 miles) east-northeast of Bitung, a city on the northern coast of the island of Sulawesi. It struck about 48 kilometers (29.8 miles) deep, making it a shallow earthquake, according to the country's seismological agency (BMKG). BMKG said a tsunami warning was in effect for coastlines of the Molucca Sea. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center also said hazardous tsunami waves were possible within 300 kilometers (186 miles) of the epicenter, but did not issue a tsunami alert. "Government agencies responsible for threatened coastal areas should take action to inform and instruct any coastal populations at risk in accordance with their own evaluation, procedures and the level of threat," the center said in a bulletin. Computer models from the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center showed that tsunami waves, if generated, could start reaching coastlines from 10:04 a.m. local time (0304 GMT) "Actual arrival times may differ and the initial wave may not be the largest. A tsunami is a series of waves and the time between waves can be five minutes to one hour," it cautioned. Indonesia is on the so-called `Pacific Ring of Fire`, an arc of fault lines circling the Pacific Basin that is prone to frequent and large earthquakes. In December 2004, a magnitude-9.1 tremor, one of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded, struck off the west coast of Sumatra, unleashing a massive tsunami that struck scores of countries in the region and killed at least 227,898 people. More recently, in July 2013, at least 35 people were killed and more than 270 others were injured when a strong 6.2-magnitude earthquake struck the province of Aceh on the island of Sumatra. The tremors destroyed more than 1,900 homes in the region and damaged nearly 2,400 others.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2939/update1--powerful-earthquake-strikes-off-indonesia-tsunami-warning-issued.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619