

## Frequently Asked Questions: Tsunamis

### What is a tsunami?

A tsunami is a series of waves created by a sudden, significant displacement of the ocean floor. They can be generated by an underwater earthquake or landslide. Tsunami waves are almost impossible to see in the open ocean and are capable of moving hundreds of miles an hour. When they approach shallow coastal waters they can increase dramatically in height.

Tsunamis can cause great loss of life and property damage. Their waves carry enormous energy and can destroy most structures either directly by their impact or by flooding. People caught in open coastal areas, such as on beaches, streets or sidewalks in the inundation area, are at great risk of drowning or being washed out to sea.

Tsunami waves may be generated by an event thousands of miles away (Distant Source) and take four or more hours to reach our coast. They may also be generated locally (Local Source) and arrive in as little as 10-15 minutes, before there is time for an official warning from local emergency notification systems. Experts have determined that a Local Source tsunami that produces significant damage is extremely unlikely to occur in San Francisco.

### How will I know if a tsunami is approaching?

- Outdoor Public Warning System sirens will sound for five minutes.
- AlertSF, NOAA Weather Radios and Emergency Alert System broadcasts will also be used to notify the public of potential tsunamis.

In the event of any of the above, tune your radio to KCBS 740 AM or other local station for information from emergency officials.

***If you are on or near the beach and observe the water receding in an unusually rapid manner, immediately evacuate eastward to higher ground—even if no official warning has been issued.***

### When evacuating the western inundation area:

- Walk to higher ground by traveling eastward, uphill toward Sunset Boulevard
- Bring your pets in a carrier or on a leash
- Offer assistance to persons who are mobility impaired
- Take only necessary items (keys, wallet, ID, mobile phone, appropriate outerwear)
- Wait for the “all clear” message before returning to low-lying areas. Tsunami waves can continue to arrive for several hours after the initial wave and sometimes may be spaced an hour or more apart.

### What else can I do to prepare for tsunamis and other emergencies?

- Visit [www.tsunami.gov](http://www.tsunami.gov) for National Weather Service information.
- Visit [www.72hours.org](http://www.72hours.org) or call 3-1-1 for additional information on tsunamis and emergency preparedness.
- Sign up at [www.AlertSF.org](http://www.AlertSF.org) to receive emergency text alerts by mobile phone and email.