

Beat: Travel

Death toll rises to 6 after magnitude-8.2 quake off Chile

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USPA News - The death toll from a massive earthquake that struck off the coast of northern Chile on Tuesday evening has risen to six, the country's interior ministry said on Wednesday after all tsunami warnings for Latin America's Pacific coast were canceled. "I must unfortunately confirm that there is a sixth deceased," said Interior Minister Rodrigo Penailillo.

The English-language newspaper The Santiago Times said the deaths were caused by both heart attacks and falling debris from the earthquake, which also caused large fires in Iquique and Arica but have since been brought under control. The 8.2-magnitude earthquake at 8:46 p.m. local time (2346 GMT) on Tuesday was centered about 99 kilometers (62 miles) northwest of Iquique, the capital of the Tarapaca Region in northern Chile. It struck about 20.1 kilometers (12.5 miles) deep, making it an extremely shallow earthquake, according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS). Estafania Morales, a witness who lives in Iquique with her family, described the 8.2-magnitude earthquake in an interview with the newspaper. "Everything is in a panic, trees fell, apparently the road linking Iquique and Alto hospicio is cracked ... Everything was falling, televisions, radios, the bathtub broke, the windows etc," Morales said. President Michelle Bachelet, speaking in a televised national address on early Wednesday morning, said disaster zones had been declared in the regions of Arica y Parinacota and Tarapacá. The declaration allows the military to maintain order and oversee evacuations in the affected areas. About 300 inmates who were being held at a women's jail in Iquique were able to escape in the aftermath of Tuesday's earthquake. Police have said at least 26 escapees had been captured by late Wednesday morning, but searches were continuing to arrest the others. Armed Forces were reportedly on the streets in the quake-hit region to maintain order. There were no immediate reports of major structural damage, but power-cuts, fires and flooding were confirmed in Iquique, as well as looting, according to the local media. According to the Regional Emergency Operations Committees, more than 900,000 people were evacuated from areas along the coast of Chile after Tuesday's earthquake prompted tsunami warnings for much of Latin America's Pacific coast. Penailillo said all tsunami watches and warnings had been canceled by early Wednesday morning. The earthquake, which was the strongest to hit Chile in more than four years, generated small tsunami waves that caused no serious damage or casualties. "[We] estimate variations of 0.3 to 1 meter (1 to 3.2 feet) above mean sea level in Arica, Pisagua, Iquique, Patache, Tocopilla and Mejillones. These variations [in sea level] can be maintained for hours and boats and people at sea could be affected by currents," according to the Hydrographical and Oceanographical Service of the Navy (SHOA). Tuesday's quake was immediately followed by a number of aftershocks, the largest being a 6.2-magnitude earthquake that struck about 12 minutes after the initial quake. The USGS said it had detected more than 30 aftershocks by Wednesday morning, most of them in the magnitude-5 range. Chile sits on the so-called 'Pacific Ring of Fire' and is regularly struck by large earthquakes, including the 'Great Chilean earthquake' that struck the coast of central Chile on May 22, 1960. The 9.5-magnitude earthquake, the largest earthquake ever instrumentally recorded, left between 490 and 5,700 people killed. And on February 27, 2010, an epic 8.8-magnitude earthquake struck approximately 95 kilometers (60 miles) northwest of Chillan, offshore of Bio-Bio, at a depth of about 35 kilometers (21.7 miles). The earthquake, along with a resulting tsunami, left at least 525 people killed and more than 12,000 others injured while damages were estimated at \$30 billion.

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