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Civil Defense Updating Tsunami Maps

By Andrew Pereira

Researchers are using a combination of history and technology to update Hawaii's tsunami evacuation maps for the first time in 17 years.

"We could perhaps see some recommended changes to our tsunami evacuation zones by about December of this year," said Ed Teixeira, vice director of state Civil Defense.

The mapping effort is being led by University of Hawaii ocean engineering professor Dr. Kwok Fai Cheung. Cheung used a special type of radar and historical data to simulate how far inland a tsunami wave would travel after hitting the Hawaiian coast. Much of the historical data comes from the five destructive tsunamis that have hit Hawaii in the past 100 years.

Teixeira believes most of the tsunami maps won't see drastic changes, but some evacuation zones could be expanded. One example is the tsunami map that covers Dillingham Airfield on Oahu's North Shore. Dr. Cheung's computer model shows a higher wave run-up than what was previously thought.

"If his modeling stands true then we will have to work to move the evacuation line to that waterline over here," said Teixeira, while pointing to a map of Dillingham Airfield.

Officials at state Civil Defense say the time to plan for a tsunami is right now and they're urging residents to find out if their home or business is inside a tsunami evacuation zone. Prior knowledge would help prevent confusion should a tsunami warning be issued for the state.

"Everyone else that's not in a tsunami inundation zone stay put, don't head to the traffic," said Maj. Gen. Robert Lee, Hawaii's Adjutant General. "Everybody else you can walk the fifty feet above sea level or get to the third floor (and) you'll be safe."

A feature on the state Civil Defense website allows anyone to search the tsunami maps currently being used. "So if you are not sure whether you're in a tsunami inundation zone," said Lee, "type in your address and you'll know."

Find Out If You're Inside a Tsunami Evacuation Zone

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