

Alaska earthquake may have been most powerful in US in half a century; tsunami warnings canceled



Residents scrambled to higher ground or to evacuate coastal towns late Wednesday and early Thursday after a massive earthquake struck off Alaska's coast, triggering aftershocks and now-canceled tsunami warnings.

Pat Branson, mayor of Kodiak, the major city of Alaska's Kodiak Island, told CNN the magnitude 8.2 earthquake was the strongest in the area since the 1960's. The quake triggered the area's third evacuation in 18 months.

If the magnitude 8.2 estimate holds, the quake may be the most powerful in North America since a magnitude 8.7 earthquake in Alaska, Brian McNoldy, senior research associate at University of Miami's Department of Atmospheric Science, said on Twitter.

Wednesday's quake hit 56 miles east southeast of Perryville, Alaska, at about 8:15 p.m, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. The earthquake was felt throughout the Alaska Peninsula and Kodiak, the Alaska Earthquake Center said.

At least two strong aftershocks with preliminary magnitudes of 6.2 and 5.6 occurred within a half hour of the first quake, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

Based on preliminary seismic data, the earthquake may have caused light to moderate damage and probable moderate shaking.

The U.S. National Tsunami Warning Center early Thursday canceled a tsunami warning issued for parts of the state.

"Remember, strong and unusual currents may continue for several hours," a tweet from the center said. "If you have damage, please report it to your local

officials.”

The tsunami warning was canceled after waves of less than one foot arrived onshore, The Anchorage Daily News reported.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center previously issued a notice saying the potential threat to Guam and American Samoa was still under investigation. The U.S. National Tsunami Warning Center later alerted that no significant tsunami is expected and California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia and Alaska are “all clear.” A tsunami warning issued for Hawaii was also canceled.

Kodiak police advised residents to move to higher ground following the earthquake and added the local high school was open as an evacuation location.

People took to social media to share videos of themselves evacuating homes and moving to higher ground amid blaring warning sirens.

In Sand Point, Alaska, Patrick Mayer, superintendent of schools for the Aleutians East Borough, told the Anchorage Daily News he was sitting in his kitchen when the shaking started.

“It started to go and just didn’t stop,” he told the newspaper. “It went on for a long time and there were several aftershocks, too. The pantry is empty all over the floor, the fridge is empty all over the floor.”

Mayer said he evacuated to the local school, which was located on higher ground.

Jeremy Zidek, a spokesman for the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, told the newspaper he expects any damage from the earthquake may be revealed later in the morning.

The Anchorage Daily News reported that the earthquake was the third major quake in the area in 13 months.

Alaska is located along the seismically active Pacific Ring of Fire, which is a horseshoe-shaped geological disaster zone and hotbed for tectonic and volcanic activity.

The state was previously hit by the strongest earthquake ever recorded in North America: the 9.2-magnitude Good Friday earthquake in 1964 that led to 131

deaths and \$2.3 billion in property loss, according to the USGS.

Contributing: The Associated Press.

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