

# **Volcano WARNING: THESE volcanoes are most ‘OVERDUE’ for eruption and pose greatest threat**

FOLLOWING the eruption of Volcán de Fuego in Guatemala which has left at least 110 people dead and around 200 missing, and the eruption of Hawaii’s Kilauea volcano which has destroyed hundreds of homes, fears have risen over the status of other “overdue” volcanoes.

Volcanic eruptions are nearly impossible to predict, but scientists are able to estimate which volcanoes are more “overdue” than others based on their eruption history.

Ben Edwards, a professor of earth sciences at Dickinson College, said: “Overdue in human terms is very different than overdue in geologic terms.

“For example, given the observation that Yellowstone has a big eruption about every 600,000 to 700,000 years, it is probable that it will have another large eruption in the next 100,000.

“That seems like a lot of time to humans, but from the perspective of a planet that is 4.5 billion years old, a hundred thousand years in the future is relatively soon.”

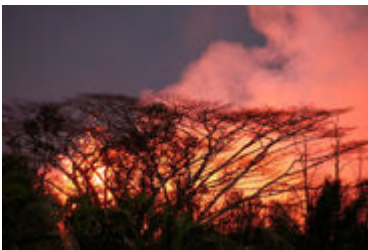


The eruption of Volcán de Fuego has left at least 110 people dead and around 200 missing

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Mount Etna is located near the densely populated city of Catania in Sicily

He warned an eruption at the Yellowstone Caldera would be devastating, with lava flows extending between 50 and 65km.

Tracy K.P. Gregg, a geologist at the University at Buffalo, also noted studying volcanic history provides scientists with some indication of which volcanoes are more “overdue” than others.

She said: “We learn about a volcano’s likely future behaviour by examining its past behaviour: We look at how often it has erupted in the past, and how big those eruptions were.

“The simplest thing to do is to assume that the volcano will continue to behave in the same way it always has.”



Mount Rainier poses a serious threat to the 3.7m residents in the Seattle area

However she warned little is known about the majority of the 550 active land volcanoes, and only those located near densely populated areas in first-world countries are regularly monitored.

She said: “Remember how Pinatubo erupted in the Philippines in 1991?

“Until that volcano began showing signs of unrest - typically small earthquakes

that are caused by magma moving beneath the volcano - no one had conducted a detailed geologic investigation of the volcano's past, so we didn't know what the volcano had done before.

"There simply isn't the time, people and money to monitor and study every active volcano."

She also warned many of the volcanoes which pose the greatest threat are those receiving the least monitoring, including Iwo Jima near Japan and Mount Tambora in Indonesia.

In addition, Ms Gregg is concerned about Mount Rainier in Washington State, due to a large amount of glacial ice and the threat it poses to the 3.7million residents in the Seattle area and the Puyallup River valley.

She said: "It seems to have experienced potentially damaging eruptions every couple of thousands of years and its last hazardous eruption was about 2,200 years ago.

"However, even a small eruption of Rainier could cause significant damage to property."

Yet Mr Edwards expressed his concern about Etna in Sicily, Veniaminof in Alaska, Klyuchevskoy in Russia, Villarrica and Llaima in Chile, and Katla and Hekla in Iceland.

He said: "These are all snow/ice-covered volcanoes that have a reasonable probability of erupting in the next 10 to 50 years.

"You can bet that if any do erupt, I will do my best to head their way to study volcano-ice interactions!"

Despite the challenges scientists face in predicting volcanic eruptions, the International Association of Volcanology and Chemistry of the Earth's Interior (IAVCEI) Decade Volcano Programme has identified the volcanoes which pose the greatest threat.

Their list is based not simply on which volcanoes are most likely to erupt, but rather on which volcanoes are located within highly populated regions and also capable of producing lethal volcanic eruptions including lava flows, pyroclastic

flows, lahars and ash falls.

**The IAVCEI Decade Volcano Programme's top 16 volcanoes are as follows:**

- Avachinsky-Koryaksky in Kamchatka, Russia
- Colima in Jalisco, Mexico
- Galeras in Nariño, Colombia
- Mauna Loa in Hawaii, United States
- Mount Etna in Sicily, Italy
- Mount Merapi in Central Java, Indonesia
- Mount Nyiragongo in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Mount Rainier, in Washington, United States
- Mount Vesuvius in Campania, Italy
- Mount Unzen in Nagasaki/Kumamoto, Japan
- Sakurajima, in Kagoshima, Japan
- Santa María in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala
- Santorini in the South Aegean, Greece
- Taal Volcano in Calabarzon, Philippines
- Teide in Canary Islands, Spain
- Ulawun in East New Britain/West New Britain, Papua New Guinea

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