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1.5 Million Flee after Chile 7.1 Quake

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Published at 7:47 am, January 3, 2011



More than 1.5 million people have been displaced in Chile as they seek higher ground, abandoning some shopping centers completely. In Concepcion, the mayor said that 100 people were trapped under a building that had collapsed according to Reuters.

In the nearby port of Talcahuano, a giant wave flooded the main square before receding and leaving behind a large fishing boat on the city streets.

The quake Saturday, tied for the fifth largest in the world since 1900, set off tsunami waves that swamped some nearby islands before moving across the Pacific. Hawaii began evacuations before dawn, but by early afternoon there — more than 15 hours after the earthquake first struck 6,500 miles away — the fears of a destructive wave had passed. Countries including Japan and the Philippines were on alert and ordered limited evacuations in anticipation of waves hitting Sunday.

Shortly after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck in Valparaíso in 1985, the country established strict building codes, according to Andre Filiatrault, the director of the Multidisciplinary Center for Earthquake Engineering Research at the University at Buffalo.

"There is a lot of reinforced concrete in Chile, which is normal in Latin America," Professor Filiatrault said. "The only issue in this, like any earthquakes, are the older buildings and residential construction that might not have been designed according to these codes."

Some mobile-phone communication towers were knocked out in Araucania region and several aftershocks have been reported.

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