

## Death toll in Chile quake reaches 723

From Karl Penhaul, CNN

March 1, 2010 3:29 p.m. EST



A woman appears distraught Monday as she surveys damage to her house in the Chilean village of Penca.

### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- **NEW:** Three people trapped inside building in Concepcion, fire commander says
- Death toll rises to 723 after Chile's 8.8-magnitude quake; most deaths in Maule region
- Six hospitals collapse and another two are damaged, World Health Organization says
- Chilean defense minister blames Navy for not sounding tsunami alarm

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**Concepcion, Chile (CNN)** -- Rescuers searched for survivors Monday as crews sought to deliver food and water and prevent looting after the fifth strongest earthquake in some 100 years ravaged central and southern Chile.

More than 1.5 million people were without power in and around the capital of Santiago, according to Chile's National Emergency Office, but the hardest-hit areas after Saturday's 8.8-magnitude quake were farther south in the Maule and Bio Bio regions along the coast.

Authorities said 544 of the 723 reported deaths were in Maule, where a sewer system collapsed, water towers were close to toppling and communities lacked basic services, the emergency office said.

Many people were without safe drinking water and electricity or gas service in Bio Bio, where 64 deaths occurred, according to the Chilean government's latest figures.

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*Video: Rescuers hear tapping from building*

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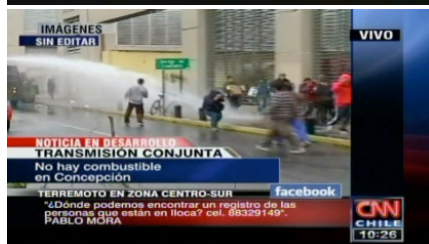
*Video: U.S. envoy praises Chilean efforts*

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*Video: Stories of survival in Chile*

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Video: Looting reported after quake

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Fresh from a stint in earthquake-ravaged Haiti, rescuers worked to free people who could be trapped in a 15-story building in hard-hit Concepcion in central Chile, about 70 miles (115 kilometers) from the earthquake's epicenter.

Fire commander Juan Carlos Subercaseaux confirmed Monday three people are trapped inside a collapsed building, according to CNN Chile, CNN's partner network. Rescuers said they heard banging and yelling from one of the apartments, CNN Chile reported.

Authorities believe 40 or 50 people could be inside the building but don't know whether they are alive.

[See scenes of devastation from the quake](#)

Six hospitals in Chile collapsed and another two were severely damaged in the earthquake, the World Health Organization said, adding there's a shortage of health care personnel.

The Chilean air force has set up four field hospitals, each holding up to 60 patients. WHO on Monday called on other countries in the region to send field hospitals and generators to help. The rescue and recovery work unfolded as Chile's defense minister blamed its navy for not issuing a tsunami warning after the earthquake. Such a move could have allowed coastal villagers to flee to higher ground.

"The truth even if it hurts [is that] a division of the Navy made a mistake," Defense Minister Francisco Vidal said.

After the quake initially struck, President Michelle Bachelet said a [tsunami](#) was unlikely.

Yet a large wave crashed later into the Chilean islands of Juan Fernandez, killing at least eight people and leaving another eight missing, the emergency office said.

Chilean authorities later realized the earthquake generated large waves that slammed coastal areas.

"What we saw ... is a tsunami," Vidal said.

The navy has an emergency system in place under which captains in each port may issue warnings when sea levels begin to rise. Those captains eventually sounded the alarm and helped prevent additional loss of lives.

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Calling the [quake](#) an "unthinkable disaster," Bachelet said a "state of catastrophe" remained in effect in the worst-hit regions, allowing for the restoration of order and speedy distribution of aid.

Chile hopes to resume normal commercial air service soon, Bachelet said in remarks on the Chilean government's Web site. Authorities also are working to prevent the possible spread of disease, she said.

"We're facing an emergency without parallel in the history of [Chile](#). The passage of time has demonstrated that we're facing a catastrophe of unforeseen intensity, one that caused damages that are going to require immense, united efforts from all sectors of the country -- private and public," Bachelet said.

The earthquake is tied for the fifth strongest since 1900, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Another 8.8 quake struck off Ecuador in 1906.

Stronger quakes occurred in Russia's Kamchatka (magnitude 9) in 1952, off northern Sumatra in 2004 (magnitude 9.1), in Alaska in 1964 (magnitude 9.4) and south of Concepcion -- not far from the epicenter of Saturday's quake -- in 1960 (magnitude 9.5).

Looting broke out in parts of the country Sunday. Desperate residents scrounged for water and supplies inside empty and damaged supermarkets. Authorities used tear gas and water cannons to disperse looters.

In Concepcion, the Bio Bio region's capital, there were not enough police to control all those seeking food and supplies from stores. Some became desperate as supermarkets closed and gas was unavailable, CNN Chile reported.

Bachelet said her government had reached an agreement with major supermarkets in which they would give away food basics. The armed forces was available to help with security and food distribution, she said.

More than 90 aftershocks have been recorded, ranging from 4.9 to 6.9 in magnitude.

Bachelet has said some 2 million people had been affected, The Chilean Red Cross reported that some 500,000 homes sustained considerable damage.

Chile has received offers of international aid, Bachelet said. The U.S. military and the U.S. Agency for International Development were working to provide communications support in the form of satellite phones, the State Department said.

The United Nations confirmed Monday that Chile had requested assistance and said it was ready to help. Chile asked for mobile bridges, field hospitals with dialysis centers, satellite phones, electric generators, salt water purification systems and field kitchens, said Elizabeth Byrs of the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Megan Mattson said the Chilean government "has not yet accepted additional offers of assistance, pending the completion of an assessment of specific needs." She noted Santiago's airport remained closed to foreign aid.

"As soon as the Chilean government establishes additional needs, the United States stands ready to assist in disaster response efforts," she said.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will travel to [Santiago](#) on Tuesday on a previously scheduled trip through Latin America.

All 300 American and Chilean employees of the U.S. Embassy have been accounted for and are safe, Paul Simons, U.S. ambassador to Chile, told CNN's "American Morning."

No Americans were reported dead or seriously injured Monday morning, Simons said, but efforts to locate and contact thousands of Americans continue.

### [Why Haiti's less powerful quake was a bigger killer](#)

President-elect Sebastian Piñera sought to rally spirits in nationally televised remarks Sunday night, announcing a reconstruction plan called "Up With Chile."

"We will raise Chile," he said. "It's not going to be a short task. It's not going to be easy. It will require a lot of effort, a lot of resources and a lot of time."

CNN's Brian Byrnes, Andreena Narayan and Bertha Ramos-Rodriguez contributed to this report.