

Australian dies, six missing in Samoan tsunami

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An Australian woman has been killed and another six of her compatriots may be missing after a deadly earthquake and tsunami struck the remote Pacific island of Samoa.

The victim was a 50-year-old woman from Tasmania, a spokesman for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) spokesman said.

A New Zealander has also been killed.



Photos: The tsunami devastation

Around 40 people are dead following the 8.3 magnitude quake that struck at 6.48am Tuesday local time (0348 Wednesday AEST), triggering a massive tsunami.

The earthquake struck midway between the two island groups of Samoa and American Samoa.

Three Australians are in hospital in Samoa and authorities are trying to locate another six Australians whom they cannot account for at the moment.

A DFAT spokesman confirmed one Australian woman had been killed and said consular officials were helping her family.

"Three other Australians have been hospitalised and are receiving consular assistance," the spokesman said.

"At this stage, six other Australians remain unaccounted for and our high commission is urgently seeking to confirm their safety."

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[Tsunami expert discusses specifics](#)

Melbourne man Nick Rees says his father has suspected broken ribs after being caught up in the disaster.

Mr Rees said his mother, father and sister were in Samoa and the Australian High Commission was assisting the family but it was difficult to get any information.

"I've been only able to have brief conversations due to the fact that other people want to use the telephone to let their relatives know that they're okay as well," Mr Rees told ABC radio.

"We don't really know much information, but I would assume it was quite brief with little warning given that my father was injured.

"I'm assuming they would've got further away if they could."

Australia and New Zealand have both received appeals for help from the Samoan government.

"We are now discussing with the New Zealand and Samoan governments how best we can meet this request," the DFAT spokesman said.

A team of officials from foreign affairs and defence will be leaving for Samoa shortly.

United States President Barack Obama has declared "a major disaster exists" in American Samoa, while Samoa's deputy prime minister Misa Telefoni says popular resort areas have been devastated.

DFAT has reissued its travel advice for Samoa, warning of the dangers associated with the overnight natural disasters.

Foreign Minister Stephen Smith told ABC Radio one of the biggest concerns for authorities was the disaster had struck the popular resort areas of Samoa.

"The most difficult issue for us is the disaster has struck the southeast portion of the island, where we find a number of luxury and budget accommodation resorts," Mr Smith said.

"We are concerned Australians may have been there holidaying."

If you are concerned for family in the area, the Department of Foreign Affairs has set up a hotline. Call 1300 555 135.

Authorities, at the moment, have no concerns about Australians who may be in Tonga.

"I have spoken to our high commissioner in Tonga and the level of damage is such that we're not concerned at this stage about any Australians," Mr Smith said.

Mr Smith said the advice was that Australians in Pacific islands such as Niue, Fiji, Noumea, New Zealand or Nauru had not been harmed.

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard said the government could consider financial aid for Samoa.

"From the past, I think people know this is a country that has got a prior track record of extending a helping hand around our region when it's required," she told reporters.

"But, obviously, these events are still unfolding. They are being monitored closely.

"As soon as we can provide people with further information, we will."

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who is travelling in Western Australia, is expected to comment on the situation later today.

Samoa tsunami toll may exceed 100

A series of tsunamis smashed into the Pacific island nations of American and Western Samoa killing possibly more than 100 people, destroying villages and injuring hundreds, officials said on Wednesday.

A Pacific-wide tsunami warning was issued after a huge 8.0 magnitude undersea quake off American Samoa, with reports of a small tsunami reaching New Zealand and rising sea levels in several South Pacific island nations.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre cancelled its warning, but Japan's Meteorological Agency issued a local tsunami warning for the country's eastern coast, warning of a possible tsunami of 50 cm (2 feet).

The Indian Ocean tsunami on December 26, 2004 killed about 230,000 people across 11 countries.

Shortly after local radio tsunami warnings were issued in American and Western Samoa, waves started crashing into the capital of American Samoa, Pago Pago, and villages and resorts on the southern coasts of the tiny island nations, witnesses said.

"It's believed as of now, there could be a number close to 100 deaths," said Ausegalia Mulipola, assistant chief executive of Western Samoa's disaster management office.

"They are still continuing the searches for any missing bodies in the area," Mulipola told Reuters, adding the southern side of the country's main island Upolu was the worst hit.

"There have been reports of villages, where most of the houses have been run over by the sea," he said.

"Some areas have been flattened and the tsunami had brought a lot of sand onshore, so there have been reports the sand has covered some of the bodies. So we need specialised machines to search for bodies that are buried under the sand."

In American Samoa, a U.S. territory, the death toll was officially 14, but could rise, said officials.

Five tsunami waves

A series of five waves hit Pago Pago, swamping the harbourside business centre and temporarily closing the airport.

Yachtsman Wayne Hodgins, who has in Pago Pago harbour, said he had heard of people being swept away.

"There was a couple and a young boy, they were clinging to the lifeline. The water came and went very, very quickly, but it was absolutely ferocious," Hodgins told American media.

American Samoa tourism chief David Vaeafe said water levels rose about three minutes after the tsunami warning, with small villages around the capital devastated.

"Access to Pago Pago has been closed. Water had come up to the first floor. The radio station was evacuated, a lot of damage, structural damage to the steel and brick structure," Vaeafe told Australia's Sky Television from Pago Pago.

There were reports of looting in Pago Pago as people flocked into supermarkets to stockpile supplies. Fishing boats not thrown onto reefs by the tsunamis moved out to open sea for safety.

The tsunami caused waves of 1.5 metres above normal sea level off American Samoa, according to the Pacific Western Tsunami Warning Centre in Hawaii. But there were unconfirmed reports of waves taller than 4 metres.

Hundreds of people, including tourists, fled coastal homes and resorts to higher ground in both nations.

"As of right now, everybody is up in the high mountain ranges," said Senetenari Malele, announcer for local radio station Showers of Blessings in American Samoa.

Hundreds of people have been injured in the tsunamis.

"Injured people are being stabilised onsite by teams in the villages and will be brought over to the main hospital, but roads and communications are damaged," Western Samoa health chief Palanitina Toelupe told Reuters from the emergency ward of the country's main hospital in the capital Apia.

"So far, we are coping. We will definitely need help from overseas, but we will have to assess that later."