



Media Release
Monday 5 December 2016

Coastal households receive tsunami advice

Around 500 Selwyn households recently received a letter from the Council with advice on what to do in a tsunami and how to receive alerts if there is a tsunami threat.

The information was sent to households located in Selwyn's coastal areas and around the edge of Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere. These properties are located within an 'orange zone' which may need to be evacuated in the event of a tsunami warning.

"If a tsunami warning was issued, people inside the orange zone may need to evacuate this area. We have written to these property owners to advise them to sign up for our emergency text and email alert system Selwyn Gets Ready and to provide advice on what to do in a tsunami threat," says Selwyn District Civil Defence Controller Douglas Marshall.

Mr Marshall says that the boundaries for the orange zone have been identified based on scientific advice from Environment Canterbury on the maximum credible event that could impact Selwyn.

None of Selwyn's main townships are inside the orange zone or are considered to be at risk from tsunamis. Both Leeston and Southbridge are outside the orange zone. The only smaller settlements inside the orange zone are Rakaia Huts, Taumutu, Upper Selwyn Huts, Lower Selwyn Huts and Greenpark Huts.

Three types of tsunamis could affect Selwyn. Distant tsunamis are generated from a significant distance, such as from across the Pacific in Chile. There will be more than three hours warning time for New Zealand for these tsunamis, and more likely longer. Regional tsunamis are generated between one and three hours travel time away from their destination. An eruption from an underwater volcano in the Kermadec Trench to the north of New Zealand could generate a regional tsunami. Local tsunamis are generated very close to New Zealand. With this type of tsunami there is no time to issue an official warning and people will need to respond immediately.

"Most of the previous tsunami threats we have had in Selwyn have been from distant source tsunamis and we have usually have several hours warning. However local and regional tsunami threats could also occur so we also need to be prepared for those scenarios," says Mr Marshall.

The letter provides advice to affected households on how to respond to the different risks. Three evacuation centre locations have been identified at Lincoln Event Centre, Leeston Library and Southbridge Hall where people can go after evacuating. These locations are all located outside the orange tsunami risk zone. People can also go to family or friends houses outside the orange zone.

"We are encouraging people living near the coast or the lake to think about how they would evacuate their households if a tsunami threat did occur, to have the items they want to take with them ready to go so that can leave quickly if they need to," Mr Marshall says.

In addition to the Selwyn Gets Ready emergency alert system, if there is time to do so, volunteer Community Response teams will also door-knock in affected townships and council and emergency services will also warn residents using emergency vehicle sirens in affected communities if time allows this.

“In a close to shore tsunami there will not be time to issue a warning. The advice to people living within the orange zone in Selwyn is the same as for all New Zealand households living near our coast – if you feel a long or strong earthquake or see a sudden rise or fall in sea level or hear loud or unusual noises from the sea then people should move inland or go to higher ground as soon as possible,” Mr Marshall says.

“Many tsunami threats will only affect our beaches or coastlines and when a tsunami warning is issued it is really important that people stay away from these areas. Unfortunately quite often in New Zealand people will go to beaches to watch a wave come in. Not only is this dangerous but it ties up emergency services trying to keep people away from these areas at a time when they are very busy,” he adds.

After an initial wave occurs, strong waves can affect an area for the next 24 hours so people need to stay out of affected areas and away from beaches until they receive official advice it's safe to re-enter these areas.

For more information on tsunami risk and warnings in Selwyn, visit www.selwyn.govt.nz/tsunami

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