

Quake rattles Salt Lake City, damages Mormon temple

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A 5.7-magnitude earthquake struck near Salt Lake City in the US state of Utah on Wednesday, damaging an iconic Mormon temple and

disrupting efforts to battle the coronavirus pandemic.

The shallow quake—Utah's strongest since 1992—also closed Salt Lake City airport, damaged buildings downtown and left tens of thousands without power.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or deaths.

The Salt Lake Temple, one of the Mormon Church's largest and most famous buildings, sustained damage.

A 12.5-foot (3.81-meter), three-ton copper statue depicting an ancient American prophet from the Book of Mormon sitting atop the building was damaged.

"The trumpet on the Angel Moroni statue fell off, and there is minor displacement of some of the temple's smaller spire stones," said spokesman Daniel Woodruff.

The 16 million-strong Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as it is formally known, is based in Salt Lake City.

It had already suspended all public ceremonies and gatherings over the coronavirus pandemic.

The quake also brought down Utah's coronavirus hotline due to evacuations at the call center, as well as the state's public health lab.

The state's daily coronavirus news conference was canceled.

"Please stay away from the downtown area while crews assess damage," tweeted Governor Gary Herbert.

Salt Lake City International Airport tweeted that it "is not currently operational," with the air control tower, terminals and concourses all evacuated.

Rocky Mountain Power said electricity to some 55,000 customers had been knocked out by the quake, which hit at a depth of six miles (10 kilometers), said the US Geological Survey.

The Salt Lake Tribune said there were reports of damage to homes and businesses.

"This is one of the scariest things I've ever gotten through in my entire life," Griffin Bonacci, who lives in Magna near the epicenter, told the newspaper.

"It kept ramping up and ramping up and ramping up. It was like a bomb went off. And then, all of a sudden, stuff all around my house was just falling everywhere."

The quake was followed by more than 25 aftershocks, the strongest registering magnitude 4.4, the USGS said.

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