

# Damage reported as 5.4-magnitude quake strikes Puerto Rico

May 2 2020, by Dánica Coto

---



Un policía con una máscara protectora por el coronavirus, retira escombros dejados por un sismo de magnitud 5,4 en Ponce, Puerto Rico, el sábado, 2 de mayo del 2020. No hubo informes inmediatos de víctimas. (AP Foto/Carlos Giusti)

A 5.4-magnitude earthquake struck near southern Puerto Rico on

Saturday, briefly knocking out power and forcing the relocation of at least 50 families on an island where some people still remain in shelters from previous quakes earlier this year. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the quake hit at a depth of 5.6 miles (nine kilometers) near the city of Ponce and the towns of Guanica and Guayanilla, where hundreds of homes were destroyed by a quake in early January that killed one person and caused millions of dollars in damage.

The [earthquake](#) cracked walls, flung goods off supermarket shelves and caused a second-story balcony to crash in the southern coastal city of Ponce. It occurred amid a two-month lockdown and just hours after the government announced the biggest spike in COVID-19 cases since the first one was reported in March in the U.S. territory.

"This is a crisis on top of another crisis," said Health Secretary Lorenzo González.

Most of the damage was reported in Ponce, where officials were still going neighborhood by neighborhood to assess damage as rescue crews fanned out across the region.

"It's time to cry if you have to cry," said Ponce Mayor María Meléndez. "We're human beings."

Gov. Wanda Vázquez said the 50 families that have to be relocated will not be placed in shelters given concerns about the coronavirus contagion. She also urged Puerto Ricans to stay home even if they want to drive to the island's southern region to help those affected and distribute food as they did earlier this year following the 6.4-magnitude earthquake.



A police officer, wearing a protective face mask as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, walks past debris caused by a 5.4-magnitude earthquake, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Saturday, May 2, 2020. The quake hit near southern Puerto Rico, jolting many from their beds on an island where some people still remain in shelters from previous quakes earlier this year. (AP Photo/Carlos Giusti)

"We're up against an [emergency situation](#), but we can't forget that the most lethal one we have in our hands is COVID-19," she said as she urged people to wear masks and other protective equipment even if they have to evacuate damaged buildings. "If we forget these, the result is going to be worse."

Meanwhile, in Guánica, Mayor Santos Seda told The Associated Press



that no major damage has been reported so far, but noted that between five to 10 people remain in a shelter since the 6.4-magnitude quake that hit in January.

"Thank God everyone is OK," he said. "The infrastructure is already weak."

Several aftershocks hit Puerto Rico's southern region, including a 4.9-magnitude one.

Víctor Huérfano, director of Puerto Rico's Seismic Network, said in a phone interview that while it's understandable many people are afraid and surprised by the most recent earthquake, it's not unusual given the [seismic activity](#) that began in the region in late December.



A worker measures the temperature of Gen. Jose Reyes as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, as he arrives for a briefing on the aftermath of a 5.4-magnitude earthquake, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Saturday, May 2, 2020. The quake hit near southern Puerto Rico, jolting many from their beds on an island where some people still remain in shelters from previous quakes earlier this year. (AP Photo/Carlos Giusti)



A police officer, wearing s protective face mask as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, removes debris caused by a 5.4-magnitude earthquake, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Saturday, May 2, 2020. The quake hit near southern Puerto Rico, jolting many from their beds on an island where some people still remain in shelters from previous quakes earlier this year. (AP Photo/Carlos Giusti)





Residents, wearing protective face masks as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, makes photos of damage caused by a 5.4-magnitude earthquake, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Saturday, May 2, 2020. The quake hit near southern Puerto Rico, jolting many from their beds on an island where some people still remain in shelters from previous quakes earlier this year. (AP Photo/Carlos Giusti)



City workers, wearing protective face masks as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, remove debris caused by a 5.4-magnitude earthquake, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Saturday, May 2, 2020. The quake hit near southern Puerto Rico, jolting many from their beds on an island where some people still remain in shelters from previous quakes earlier this year. (AP Photo/Carlos Giusti)





A resident, wearing a protective face mask as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, makes photos of damage caused by a 5.4-magnitude earthquake, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Saturday, May 2, 2020. The quake hit near southern Puerto Rico, jolting many from their beds on an island where some people still remain in shelters from previous quakes earlier this year. (AP Photo/Carlos Giusti)





City workers, wearing protective face masks as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, remove debris caused by a 5.4-magnitude earthquake, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Saturday, May 2, 2020. The quake hit near southern Puerto Rico, jolting many from their beds on an island where some people still remain in shelters from previous quakes earlier this year. (AP Photo/Carlos Giusti)



City workers, wearing protective face masks as a precaution against the spread of the new coronavirus, remove debris caused by a 5.4-magnitude earthquake, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, Saturday, May 2, 2020. The quake hit near southern Puerto Rico, jolting many from their beds on an island where some people still remain in shelters from previous quakes earlier this year. (AP Photo/Carlos Giusti)

"In the long run, it's decreasing, but you can have peaks," he said, adding that he expects strong aftershocks to continue.

Nerves are already frayed in many parts of the island as Puerto Rico continues to recover from Hurricane Maria, a string of strong earthquakes and the coronavirus. Silvestre Alicea, a 67-year-old man who moved back to Puerto Rico from New York upon retiring, lost his home in January's earthquake and is still living with his sister in Guanica.

"This is unreal," he said, adding that some neighbors have left the area to stay with relatives elsewhere and that many, including a security guard who worked all night, are now sitting nervously in their balconies. "He hasn't slept."

Alicea, however, said he decided to knock down a couple of breadfruits from a nearby tree as the aftershocks continue: "I'm taking it easy. There's nothing else you can do."

© 2020 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Damage reported as 5.4-magnitude quake strikes Puerto Rico (2020, May 2) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-05-magnitude-quake-puerto-rico.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.