

Powerful earthquake shakes southern Mexico, at least 5 dead

June 23 2020, by María Verza and Christopher Sherman



People brace themselves against a wall during a 7.5 earthquake, in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake centered near the resort of Huatulco in southern Mexico swayed buildings Tuesday in Mexico City and sent thousands into the streets. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano)

A powerful earthquake centered near the southern Mexico resort of

Huatulco on Tuesday killed at least five people, swayed buildings in Mexico City and sent thousands fleeing into the streets.

Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said one person was killed in a building collapse in Huatulco, Oaxaca. Otherwise he said reports were of minor damage from the magnitude 7.4 quake, including broken windows and collapsed walls. Oaxaca Gov. Alejandro Murat said a second person was killed in an apparent house collapse in the mountain village of San Juan Ozolotepec and a third died in circumstances he did not explain.

Federal civil defense authorities reported two more deaths: a worker at the state-run oil company, Pemex, fell to his death from a refinery structure, and a man died in the Oaxaca village of San Agustin Amatengo when a wall fell on him.

Pemex also said the quake caused a fire at its refinery in the Pacific coast city of Salina Cruz, relatively near the epicenter. It said one worker was injured and the flames were quickly extinguished. Churches, bridges and highways also suffered damage during the quake.

López Obrador said there had been more than 140 aftershocks, most of them small.

Seismic alarms sounded midmorning with enough warning for residents to exit buildings. Power was knocked out to some areas.



A man, wearing a robe, joins other residents on a pedestrian walkway on Reforma Avenue after they were evacuated from their buildings due to an earthquake, in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake centered near the resort of Huatulco in southern Mexico swayed buildings Tuesday in Mexico City and sent thousands into the streets. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano)

Helicopters flew over downtown Mexico City and police patrols sounded their sirens.

Groups of people still milled around in close proximity on streets and sidewalks in some neighborhoods of the capital about an hour after the quake. Many were not wearing masks despite past appeals from municipal officials for them to do so as a way to curb the spread of the

new coronavirus.

Inside a Mexico City military barracks converted to COVID-19 hospital, medical staff suited in protective equipment tried to calm anxious patients. Unable to evacuate isolation areas, patients huddled under a large beam in the women's ward while a nurse tried to calm one having a panic attack.

Teresa Juárez could only wish for it to pass quickly from her hospital bed where she lay connected to oxygen. Diabetic and with high blood pressure, Juárez said she thought about her five children. "It's horrible, you're here and you don't know what to do," she said.



A policeman removes rubble from a building damaged by an earthquake in Oaxaca, Mexico, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake was centered near the

resort of Huatulco, in the southern state of Oaxaca. (AP Photo/Luis Alberto Cruz Hernandez)

The U.S. Geologic Survey said the quake hit at 10:29 a.m. (11:29 a.m. Eastern) along Mexico's southern Pacific coast at a depth of 16 miles (26 km). The epicenter was 7 miles (12 km) south-southwest of Santa Maria Zapotitlan in Oaxaca state

It was felt in Guatemala and throughout south and central Mexico.

In Huatulco, a laid-back beach destination known for surfing and small protected coves, the earthquake knocked goods off shelves and some rubble from buildings.

Mari González of the Princess Mayev hotel in Huatulco said staff and guests were able to evacuate the building before the quake, but that 45 minutes after the initial quake they were still outside as strong aftershocks continued.

"It was strong, very strong," she said.

González said there was some visible broken glass and mirrors, but no major damage. The staff was waiting for the aftershocks to dissipate before fully evaluating the property.



A policeman stands in front of a partially collapsed building after an earthquake in Oaxaca,, Mexico, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake was centered near the resort of Huatulco, in the southern state of Oaxaca. (AP Photo/Luis Alberto Cruz Hernandez)

Local news media reported damage to some buildings in the state capital, Oaxaca city. State officials said they were looking for damage.

The USGS estimated that some 2 million people felt strong or moderate shaking and another 49 million felt weak or light shaking.

The earthquake hit a quake-prone region where four underground tectonic plates come together. In the past 35 years, there have been at least seven magnitude 7 or greater earthquakes, killing around 10,000 people—most of them in a 1985 8.0 quake.

"This has the potential to be a deadly earthquake and cause significant damage," U.S. Geological Survey seismologist Paul Earle said. "This area is capable of and has had larger earthquakes in the past."

"There will be aftershocks," Earle said. "It is not unexpected to see a magnitude 6 at this point and a number of smaller ones."



El personal de un hospital en Ciudad de México sale a la calle al sentir un terremoto, el 23 de junio del 2020. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)



Ground workers stand in the median of Reforma Avenue after a 7.5 earthquake, in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake centered near the resort of Huatulco in southern Mexico swayed buildings Tuesday in Mexico City and sent thousands into the streets. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano)



A man removes rubble from a building damaged by an earthquake in Oaxaca, Mexico, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. (AP Photo/Luis Alberto Cruz Hernandez)



A woman comforts her son after being evacuated from a building during a 7.5 earthquake, in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake centered near the resort of Huatulco in southern Mexico swayed buildings Tuesday in Mexico City and sent thousands into the streets.(AP Photo/Fernando Llano)



Employees stand outside of their work building after a 7.5 earthquake, in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake centered near the resort of Huatulco in southern Mexico swayed buildings Tuesday in Mexico City and sent thousands into the streets.(AP Photo/Fernando Llano)



People evacuate a building during a 7.5 earthquake, in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake centered near the resort of Huatulco in southern Mexico swayed buildings Tuesday in Mexico City and sent thousands into the streets. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano)



Juarez public hospital health workers wait on a street after a 7.5 earthquake sent them out from their work areas, in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake centered near the resort of Huatulco in southern Mexico swayed buildings Tuesday in Mexico City and sent thousands into the streets. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)



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Employees gather outside of their work building after a 7.5 earthquake, in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake centered near the resort of Huatulco in southern Mexico swayed buildings Tuesday in Mexico City and sent thousands into the streets.(AP Photo/Fernando Llano)



A woman and boy sit on a set of swings as they wait for the all-clear to return to their apartment, after an earthquake in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake struck near the Huatulco resort in southern Mexico on Tuesday morning, swayed buildings in Mexico City and sent thousands fleeing into the streets. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)



A woman sits with her son outside home as they wait until it is called safe to return to their apartment, after an earthquake in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake struck near the Huatulco resort in southern Mexico on Tuesday morning, swayed buildings in Mexico City and sent thousands fleeing into the streets. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte)



People react after a 7.7 earthquake in Oaxaca, Mexico, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake centered near the resort of Huatulco in southern Mexico swayed buildings in Mexico City and sent thousands into the streets. (AP Photo/Luis Alberto Cruz Hernandez)



Security tape alert people of a building damaged by an earthquake in Oaxaca, Mexico, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake was centered near the resort of Huatulco, in the southern state of Oaxaca. (AP Photo/Luis Alberto Cruz Hernandez)



A couple embraces outside their home as they wait for the all-clear to return to their apartment, after an earthquake in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake struck near the Huatulco resort in southern Mexico on Tuesday morning, swayed buildings in Mexico City and sent thousands fleeing into the streets. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)



People embrace on the street as they wait for the all-clear to return to their apartment after an earthquake in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake struck near the Huatulco resort in the Oaxaca state on Tuesday morning, swayed buildings in Mexico City and sent thousands fleeing into the streets. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)



Military and civilian personnel follow social distancing protocols as they assemble outside after an earthquake, at a COVID-19 hospital in Military Camp 1, in Naucalpan, Mexico State, part of the Mexico City metropolitan area, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake struck near the Huatulco resort in southern Mexico on Tuesday morning, swayed buildings in Mexico City and sent thousands fleeing into the streets. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



A man holds his dog as he stands outside his home while they wait for the all-clear to return to their apartment, after an earthquake in Mexico City, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake struck near the Huatulco resort in southern Mexico on Tuesday morning, swayed buildings in Mexico City and sent thousands fleeing into the streets. (AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo)



Security tape alert people of a building damaged by an earthquake in Oaxaca, Mexico, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. The earthquake was centered near the resort of Huatulco, in the southern state of Oaxaca. (AP Photo/Luis Alberto Cruz Hernandez)



Dr. Marta Beatriz Sanchez, who returned to work Tuesday after recovering from a coronavirus infection, stands outside the COVID-19 hospital in Military Camp 1 after an earthquake was felt, in Naucalpan, Mexico State, part of the Mexico City metropolitan area, Tuesday, June 23, 2020. On the grounds of the military base, a barracks has been converted into a 100-bed hospital treating recovering and moderately ill COVID-19 patients who come from both the military and civilian populations. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

This quake happened when the Cocos plate, which is to the southwest of the area, slipped under the North American plate, Earle said.

"You've got all sorts of plates and they're moving quickly," Earle said. "The important thing is how fast the plates are moving relative to each other."

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