

# Chileans receive mistaken tsunami warning following Antarctic quake

January 24 2021

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This picture released by Chile's Air Force shows the Eduardo Frei Antarctic base at the Fildes Peninsula, west of King George Island, in May 2020

A 7.1-magnitude earthquake that struck Saturday off the coast of Antarctica triggered a tsunami warning but panic ensued when a message

to abandon coastal areas was sent to a large number of Chileans, some of whom experienced a separate, less dangerous temblor.

The shallow Antarctic quake struck at 8:36 pm (2336 GMT) in the sea east of Chile's Eduardo Frei base, the country's National Emergency Office (Onemi) said, prompting the agency to urge evacuation from "the beach area of the Antarctic" ahead of a possible tsunami.

An unrelated 5.8-magnitude earthquake meanwhile struck near Santiago at 9:07 pm, which was felt in resorts along the central and northern Pacific coast, where tourists were enjoying the country's summer season.

However due to technical error, a warning to abandon [coastal areas](#) had accidentally gone out to a large portion of the country's 18 million inhabitants rather than those in the Antarctic region.

Within minutes Onemi explained that the message had been sent by mistake and was only intended for Antarctica residents, but not before causing panic in the Chilean streets, with hundreds of people fleeing on foot or in vehicles to higher areas out of fear of a tsunami.

Onemi said a total of 80 people were evacuated in Antarctica from the Chilean Air Force's Frei base which includes a village, hospital, school, bank, post office and chapel, following the quake which struck about 210 kilometers (130 miles) east of the base.

Another 80 were evacuated from Chile's O'Higgins, Fildes and Prat bases, where no damage was recorded, as well as from five nearby unspecified foreign bases in Antarctica.

Almost two hours later, Onemi ordered the Antarctic [tsunami warning](#) and evacuation cancelled.

Frei base's maximum population in summer is 150 people, and the [average population](#) in winter is 80.

Onemi said no significant damage was reported from the Chilean quake, which occurred 14 kilometers from Santiago at a depth of 122 kilometers. The agency slightly revised the strength of both quakes from their originally reported magnitudes.

Chile is one of the most seismically active countries in the world. A 8.8-magnitude temblor in the city of Concepcion on February 27, 2010 left more than 500 dead.

The country suffered the most powerful earthquake ever recorded 60 years ago—measuring 9.6 magnitude—in the city of Valdivia.

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Citation: Chileans receive mistaken tsunami warning following Antarctic quake (2021, January 24) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-01-chileans-mistaken-tsunami-antarctic-quake.html>

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