Earthquake in New Zealand Causes Devastation, No Deaths

Voice of America, 9-5-10

New Zealand is recovering from a powerful earthquake that cut power and caused significant damage to infrastructure, but no deaths.

Officials say the 7.1 magnitude quake shook the city of Christchurch on New Zealand's South Island just before dawn Saturday. The city's second largest earthquake on record threw people out of bed and sent frightened residents running into the streets.

The quake and its aftershocks ruptured underground lines for natural gas, water and sewage. Powerful tremors also damaged bridges and disrupted power supplies and phone networks.

But only two serious injuries were reported - one man hit by a falling chimney and another hurt by flying glass.

Authorities declared a state of emergency in Christchurch with an overnight curfew in the rubble-littered city center.

Prime Minister John Key flew to Christchurch to inspect the damage. He said it was an absolute miracle that no one died. But he said it could take months to repair the damage, which is initially estimated at about $1.5 billion.

New Zealand is situated on the boundaries of the Pacific and Australian tectonic plates and experiences around 14,000 earthquakes a year, most of them relatively minor.

In 1931, the country's deadliest earthquake devastated the cities of Napier and Hastings. At least 256 people died in the magnitude 7.8 earthquake and thousands more required medical treatment.
Government seismologists put the magnitude of Saturday's quake at 7.1, while the U.S. Geological Survey gave a lower figure of 7.0.