

New Zealand Earthquake Death Toll Climbs to 98; 226 Still Missing

Power, Water, Internet and Phone Service in Short Supply

Clarissa Ward and Leezel Tanglao, ABC News, 2-24-11

The death toll from Tuesday's deadly magnitude 6.3 earthquake in New Zealand climbed to 98, with 226 people listed as missing.

The "loss of life could be more substantial than any one of us had ever dreamed of," Prime Minister John Key told New Zealand's TV ONE News.

The southern city of Christchurch was hit the hardest. Much of the region is without power and water. Internet and phone service are limited.

Dozens of aftershocks have continued to rattle the area.

"They come so fast, there's no warning," said American Laura Kastrenos, who moved to Christchurch from Massachusetts a month ago. "You sort of hear this loud rumble like a truck, like a train's going by and a split second later the ground's moving and it's very scary."

The quake hit during the middle of the work day Tuesday. Cars crumpled like soda cans and high-rise buildings were flattened.

Authorities said there may be as many as 120 bodies trapped in the Canterbury Television (CTV) building.

Students from China, Japan and other countries are among those feared dead after the building and other nearby offices collapsed.

Chinese media reported 21 students missing, with eight confirmed to be buried in the rubble.

Rescue crews stopped operations at CTV Wednesday after saying they were "100 percent certain" there were no survivors trapped in the rubble.

"The sad fact is that we're removing resources from this site to other sites where there is a high chance of survivability," Police Operations Commander Inspector Dave Lawry said Wednesday. "My heart goes out to those families ... knowing that some of their children have probably been killed in this incident."

Twenty-three bodies were recovered from the structure, the Associated Press reported today.

Woman Pulled From Rubble

There was a glimmer of hope Wednesday when rescue workers pulled a woman from the rubble of the Pyne Gould Corp building in Christchurch.

But the hope of finding more people alive fades as each day passes.

International rescue teams are now arriving to help.

"Now, we've got the capability of going out and doing searches in areas where there may still be people trapped that hitherto we haven't been able to address," Civil Defense Minister John Carters told the Associated Press.

The city has also begun what's expected to be a long recovery.

"At the end of the day, houses, buildings, they can be rebuilt, " Christchurch resident Carol Spicer said. "But you can't rebuild the lives that have been lost."