

# Humboldt team to survey Chile earthquake zone

**John Driscoll, Eureka Times-Standard, 3-22-10**

Humboldt State University geologist Lori Dengler is traveling with a team to parts of Chile ravaged by an 8.8-magnitude earthquake in February in an effort to learn how the North Coast might better prepare for a major quake and tsunami.

Dengler, chair of the HSU Geology Department, is leading a team to survey the damage and understand whether people were prepared for the quake and tsunami, which killed at least 500 people and caused a total of \$30 billion in damage. Joining her is Troy Nicolini, the warning coordinator for the National Weather Service in Eureka, and HSU geology alums Sebastian Araya and Nicholas Graehl.

The team is funded by the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute and UNESCO's International Tsunami Survey Team Protocol. Dengler has witnessed the aftermath of five of the largest earthquakes or tsunamis in recent history. That includes the 1998 quake in Papua New Guinea, the 2001 quake in southern Peru, the 2005 quake and tsunami in Indonesia, the 2006 tsunami in Crescent City and the 2009 earthquake and tsunami in Samoa.

Nicolini said he'd be focusing on the tsunami preparedness element. Did people do what they were supposed to do -- run to high ground when they felt strong earthshaking? How well educated were the people about the dangers of the tsunami zone, where dozens were killed?

"One key question is, are we doing the right thing with our education?" Nicolini said.

Nicolini is responsible for outreach programs in Humboldt, Del Norte and Mendocino counties.

Since huge earthquakes like the Chilean event happen only once every 300 years on the North Coast, Nicolini said that it's helpful to travel to places that have actually experienced a major quake and tsunami. That major quake -- which could be as large as a magnitude 9.0 -- is far less frequent than, say, tornadoes in Oklahoma.

"It's a different game when it's once every 300 years," Nicolini said.

Nicolini said that the focus of the team will be to gather information from people about how they reacted during the quake.

That can help inform the North Coast about its own efforts to protect the public in the event of a major quake or tsunami, he said.

Nicolini said the team will be flying into Santiago on March 25, and will be traveling to areas hit by the quake and tsunami based on what they find.

The team returns on April 4.