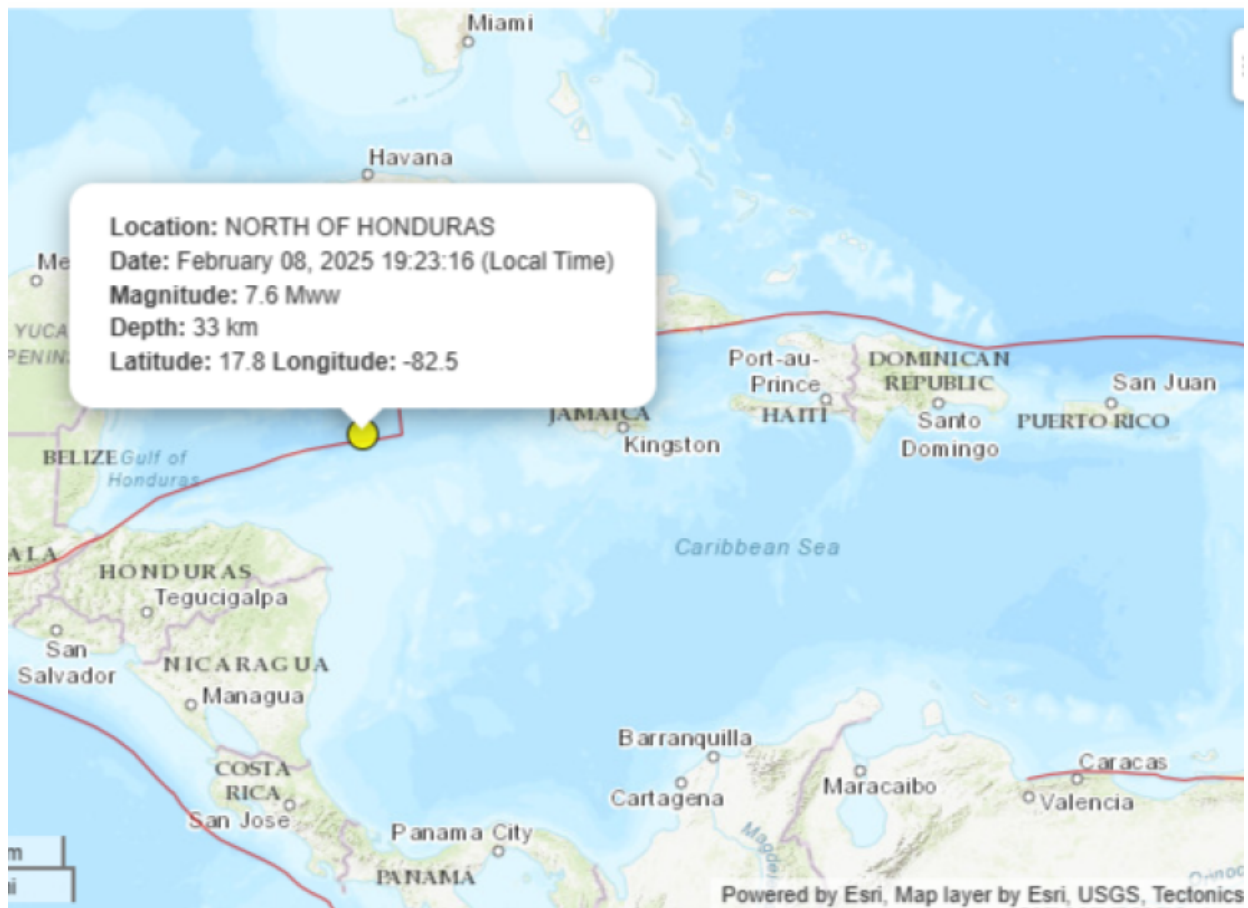


DDM Calls Weekend Tsunami Advisory A Lesson For VI

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Director of Disaster Management Mr. Jasen Penn called the Virgin Islands' collective response to this weekend's tsunami advisory commendable, adding that he hopes the experience improves public understanding of tsunami threats.

"What we saw on Saturday, February 8th was the activation of the international early warning systems to give the public advance notice that a tsunami threat had occurred," Mr. Penn said.

He added, "We witnessed residents accessing the most reliable sources for information about tsunami threats, including the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre, the Puerto Rico Seismic Network, and the Department of Disaster Management and sharing this information to ensure that everyone was aware of what was happening."

On Saturday February 8 at about 7:23 PM local time, a magnitude 7.6 earthquake occurred north of Honduras, about 1,694 kilometres (or 1,053 miles) west of Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. Preliminary readings indicated a strong quake, with shaking reported by residents in Colombia, the Cayman Islands, Costa Rica and elsewhere.

At 7:36 PM, a tsunami advisory was issued to indicate that fluctuating sea levels and strong ocean currents would be possible in Puerto Rico and the greater Virgin Islands.

Following receipt of this information, the Department of Disaster Management issued updates via social media, the DDM App and WhatsApp Channel in accordance with advisory protocols.

These messages were supported and amplified by the Department of Information and Public Relations (GIS), local media, telecommunications providers, and members of the community. The tsunami advisory was cancelled at 9:09 p.m. with minimal tsunami waves observed in the region.

Mr. Penn said that based on commentary online and calls received to DDM staff, the public asked the correct question.

“Everyone wanted to know – ‘do we evacuate?’ indicating that there is a good understanding of the safety of heading to high ground in case of a tsunami,” Mr. Penn said. He added that because the projected wave heights were less than 1 foot, no evacuation was needed, however, the public was alerted to stay off beaches and out of the water to avoid any potentially dangerous currents, and away from marinas because of the risk of sea level fluctuations.

The director encouraged residents to continue their vigilance regarding disaster preparedness, and reminded persons who wish to improve their tsunami readiness to join the Caribe Wave exercise scheduled for March 20. Participants can register by calling the DDM at 468-4200.

Residents can also learn more about how to protect themselves from tsunami risks in a readiness webinar scheduled for February 18 at 1:00 PM.

Tsunami evacuation maps are available online at www.bviddm.com/plan-your-tsunami-evacuation-route/. Persons who require assistance with tsunami or disaster plans can contact the DDM at 468-4200 or ddm@gov.vg.

CAPTION: This USGS map shows the location of the earthquake that triggered a tsunami advisory this weekend.