

# Confusing Tsunami Threat Warning Highlights Need For Disaster Planning

*Californians were unprepared for a tsunami warning as an earthquake off the coast of Humboldt County threatened rising waters for the northern coast.*

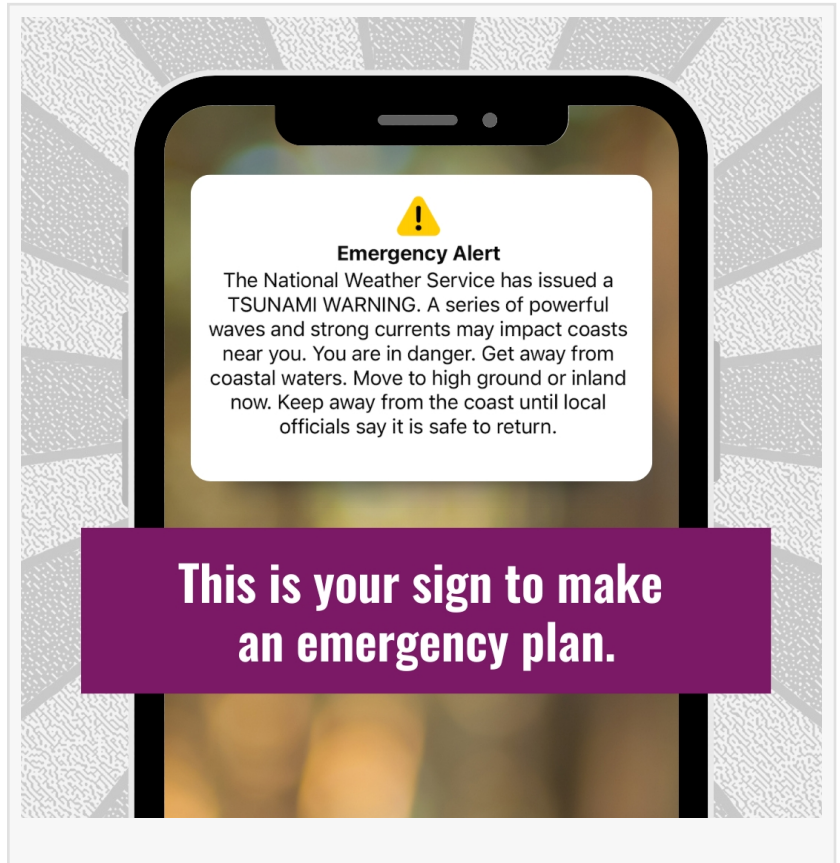
SAN LEANDRO, CA, UNITED STATES,  
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EINPresswire.com/ -- California residents were surprised to receive a tsunami warning on their mobile devices on Thursday morning, December 5, 2024. The cause? An earthquake off the coast of Humboldt County threatened rising waters for the northern coast.

[According to KQED](#), the entire coastal area received the warning because the instruments detecting tsunami danger for the US are technically limited in their ability to distinguish between threat levels. Lori Dengler, an emeritus professor of geology at Cal Poly Humboldt confirmed, "We don't have a 'little' tsunami evacuation zone. We can't tell people, 'This is only a tsunami 'C,' not a tsunami 'B' or 'A,' and so these are the only areas that are at risk because we don't have the basic science or the instrumentation to be able to do that level of detail yet."

This lack of clarity confused people across the California coast, including city leaders. Reactions ranged from full evacuations (West Berkeley, SF Zoo) to service shutdowns (BART Transbay Tube) to shelter-in-place (many schools). Many people assumed that it was a false alarm. Many others delayed action as they awaited additional instructions and information about the danger. Alameda Island residents were particularly surprised by their lack of preparedness, finding that even a voluntary evacuation created traffic jams.

Despite the waves never breaching the shoreline, this event was not a drill. "We want to make



sure that folks don't clarify today as a false alarm," said Justin Schorr, a rescue captain with the San Francisco Fire Department. "The alert issued today was the highest level of tsunami warning that we have. If we weren't prepared today to evacuate inland or to higher ground, this gives us a great opportunity to be prepared for next time."

One Bay Area resident, Jennifer Heller, founder of the wry disaster preparedness website [Here Comes the Apocalypse](#), specializes in disaster preparedness and was still caught up in the confusion after receiving the alert. After tracking down her family and learning of their shelter-in-place plans, she realized she had not made a detailed plan to react to a tsunami. Ultimately, she did nothing, and was relieved when the warning expired without incident.



Jennifer Heller, Creator of Here Comes the Apocalypse

"I understand that emergency communications are incredibly challenging," Heller added.

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Where should we meet up if we can't get home? Where should we meet up if we need to move to higher ground, and quickly? Who should get the kids? We need to think all this through ahead of time."

*Jennifer Heller, founder of Here Come the Apocalypse*

"However, it's just not possible for the entire Bay Area to evacuate to higher ground at once. This is why I fervently believe that we all need to think through our individual disaster plans. Where should we meet up if we can't get home, or if we need to move to higher ground quickly? Who should get the kids?"

Carefully planning for disaster situations is proving increasingly important. Since the 2000s, the average number of annual disasters in the US causing over \$1 billion in damages has almost tripled, from 6.7 to 18 per year.

Concerned by this rising tide, Heller created a humorous yet helpful disaster preparation system called the [Disaster Playbook](#) to encourage her friends, neighbors, and peers to take disaster planning into their own hands. After the alert, she received countless texts and phone calls from friends asking for her advice, and confirming her concerns.

For more information about the Disaster Playbook from Here Comes the Apocalypse, visit their website at [hercomestheapocalypse.com](http://hercomestheapocalypse.com).

Jennifer Heller

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