



Natural disasters

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Tsunami waves

A tsunami is one of the most powerful natural forces..

They can speed across the oceans the speed of a jet plane, swallow up islands and wipe out villages.

Out in the open ocean, tsunami waves are only about one-meter high because the water is deep. However, as the water becomes shallow, the wave slow down and begin to grow. They can rise 35 meters or higher- that's the same as a ten-floor block of flats! However the scariest thing about a tsunami wave is it's wavelength, as this determines how far inland it can travel. Whereas a large wave caused by a storm might have a wavelength of 150 meters, tsunami wave could reach up to a fearsome 1,000km!



earthquakes

An earthquake is the ground shaking caused by a slip on a fault. Stresses in earth's outer layer push the sides of the faults together. Stress builds up and slip suddenly, releasing energy that travels through the earth's crust in waves and cause the shaking we feel during an earthquake.

Faults are caused by tectonic plates grinding into each other as they continuously and slowly move. In California for example, there are two plates- the Pacific plate [which extends from Western California to Africa, including much of the Pacific ocean floor] and the North American plate [which is most of North American continent and parts of the Atlantic ocean]. The Pacific plates move northwestward past the North American plate along the San Andreas fault at a speed of two inches a year.

tornados

Tornadoes form when humid air collides with cold, dry air. The denser cold air is pushed over the warm air usually creating a thunderstorm. The warm air rises through the colder air, producing a draft. The updraft will begin to rotate if winds vary sharply in speed or direction.

The United States sees the most tornadoes averaging around 1000 a year.