

Experts to Assess the FSM's Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System

Palikir, Pohnpei (FSM Information Services): September 21, 2009 - The Federated States of Micronesia's (FSM) capacity to receive, communicate and effectively respond to tsunami warnings has been assessed by a team of national and visiting experts in Pohnpei last week.

The assessment was funded by the Australian Government Agency for International Development (AusAID) and implemented by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology in close partnership with the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC). The visiting expert team also had personnel from the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the University of Guam. Key FSM personnel from Government agencies, Non-Government Organisations and the private sector played a pivotal role in the tsunami assessment during the week.

The visiting team included experts in the fields of tsunami warnings, emergency management, regional disaster management, warning communications and hazard education. The team focused on several topics ranging from community awareness of tsunami to issuing of tsunami warnings.

One participant of the workshop commented that "although in recent history FSM has not experienced a large destructive tsunami, as a nation, we need to be prepared to issue warnings and respond to the tsunami hazard. Because of the large distribution of our islands across 1.9 million square miles of sea, the tsunami threat will not be the same for all areas. We hope to learn more about this in the workshop."

The tsunami advisories for the Pacific Ocean are issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre (PTWC) in Hawaii. Individual countries then use this advice to distribute national tsunami warnings to their communities. Countries must have processes and infrastructure in place to enable these national warnings to reach communities.

"The needs analysis will ideally serve to guide work on strengthening FSM's capacity to warn communities and mitigate against the impacts of a tsunami," said SOPAC's Risk Assessment Specialist Michael Bonte-Grapentin.

Although the primary focus of the workshop has been on tsunami, Mr Bonte-Grapentin said that many aspects of the assessment will be relevant for other multi-hazard warnings such as severe weather events.

"The workshop participants from FSM will play a critical role in providing expertise and local knowledge so that the assessment can be targeted specifically to FSM's requirements." An important outcome of the workshop has also been the development of several recommendations which can be used in aid funding and national budget submissions, as well as agency work plans.

Overall there are fourteen SOPAC Member Countries that have participated in the assessment project: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall

Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Palau and Vanuatu.

Team members of the capacity assessment included: Mr Bruce Best, Mr Chip Guard, Mr Michael Bonte-Grapentin, Litea Biukoto and Shannon McNanara.

The assessment was a three and a half day workshop held at the Cliff Rainbow Hotel in Pohnpei, from Monday September 14 to Thursday September 17, 2009.

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