

Recovery effort under way in American Samoa

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American Samoa, 06 October 2009 - Recovery efforts are underway in American Samoa, which was struck last week by a major earthquake and tsunami, along with the nearby nations of Samoa and Tonga. One-hundred-77 is confirmed dead in the three island groups. Life is returning to normal for many survivors, but they face a massive cleanup.

Workers are clearing rubble in the hard-hit coastal neighbourhoods and power and telecommunications have been restored in most parts of American Samoa. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has helped restore the water supply, although residents are being urged to boil their water. The U.S. Navy and Coast Guard have delivered meals, blankets and cots for those forced from their homes.

U.S. Park Service employees are helping in the effort. Pua Tuaua is leading a crew of workers from the National Park of American Samoa.

"There's a lot of work to be done," said Tuaua. "So the boys are here. We're all out here trying to work hard and trying to clean up this mess."

Several crew members have been affected themselves. Three lost their homes. Tuaua lost two of his relatives to the tsunami and the huge waves damaged his home and destroyed his furniture.

In the same beachside neighbourhood, a truck and tangled mass of corrugated steel are wedged against the house of Fai Faaita. He says that people farther from the coast escaped the serious damaged, but he and his neighbours took the brunt of the huge waves.

"The majority of people that live here in the coastal area got hit badly. And, houses right now are unliveable," said Faaita. "So most of the people are either living with their families or living in families and so forth."

He says the woman in the truck that was swept into his house was injured and was flown to hospital in Hawaii. Her daughter, who was with her, later died.

More than 30 people died in American Samoa. The neighbouring nation, Samoa, was harder hit. More than 130 people died there, and nine others in Tonga.

In American Samoa, life is returning to normal and most schools and businesses have reopened.

Those affected by the disaster look to the government for help. Federal and local officials hosted a meeting of residents, Monday, explaining how to apply for emergency aid and

low-interest loans. Officials say they will soon begin the process of long-term recovery, as American Samoans begin to heal their wounds.