

30 aftershocks reported in wake of D.R. quake

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A Puerto Rico Seismic Network official said Monday afternoon at least 30 aftershocks were reported in the neighboring Dominican Republic after this morning's earthquake.

PRSN investigation associate Víctor Huérfano said the aftershocks remained of moderately low intensity, varying from 3.6 to 5.1-point on the Richter scale. He said it had been at least 50 years since such an earthquake had been reported in the Dominican Republic.

The earthquake struck just after midnight Monday with a magnitude of 6.5. Its epicenter was located about six miles south of Puerto Plata, a resort town on the Dominican Republic's northern coast, said Christa von Hillebrandt, director of the Puerto Rico Seismic Network.

"It was a strong earthquake but we've only gotten reports of things falling off shelves — no injuries," she said. "This is the type of shallow quake, however, where there will likely be aftershocks."

In Puerto Rico, Huérfano said several towns, especially in the west, reported having felt the ground shake, and having seen "objects fall."

Several people in San Juan also told The STAR that they had felt shaking, and saw objects move at about 12:40.

But, Huérfano stressed, no damage was reported and "people were panicking due to what happened in the Dominican Republic."

There, he said, officials have reported two deaths, which are indirectly related to the quake.

One person died of a heart attack in San Francisco de Macorís, north of Santo Domingo, according to Emergency Operations Center Director Radhamés Lora Salcedo. He said



Patients of the José María Cabal y Báez Hospital receive medical attention in the corridors Monday after being evacuated from their rooms in Santiago, Dominican Republic after an earthquake of 6.5 on the Richter Scale damaged a wing of the hospital.

15 others were injured in Puerto Plata, 10 by an explosion of a gas tank, and the rest when a house collapsed.

Huérfano said a seismic movement of a 4.5-point magnitude was felt here minutes after the earthquake was reported in the Dominican Republic.

"Usually in Puerto Rico we can feel three to four earthquakes a month of between one and 3.5-point magnitude on the Richter scale," he said. "A 4.5-point magnitude shock happens about once a month."

Huérfano said Puerto Rico is in no danger of experiencing an earthquake as a consequence of the Dominican temblor. He said the Setentrional Fault — which caused Monday's quake — does not extend to Puerto Rico.

"Its shocks are very localized," he said.

"All seems to indicate the main event has passed, but this doesn't mean a bigger one can't be coming," he said.

On the Mercalli scale, Monday's earthquake hit a 6-point magnitude, which can

cause walls to crack and objects to fall, Huérfano said.

He said in 1953, the Dominican Republic was struck by a 7.0-magnitude quake — which is between 15 and 18 times greater than Monday's.

Police in Puerto Plata said patients were moved out of a damaged wing of the main hospital in Santiago, south of Puerto Plata.

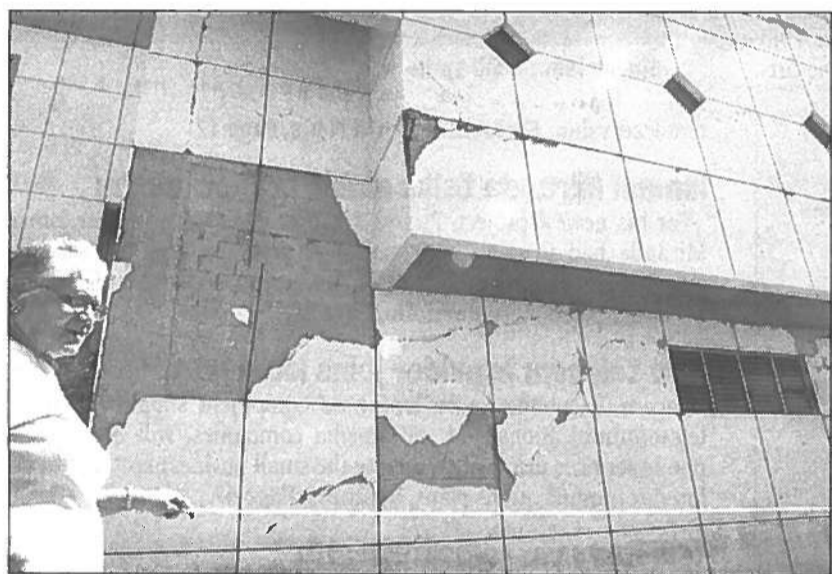
"The earthquake shook the hotel but there's no serious damage," said Salvador Roheleo, a manager at the Puerto Plata Beach Resort. "We just have a lot of nervous guests."

"It woke everyone in the house up and it was scary," said María Vargas, 45, over the telephone from her home outside Puerto Plata. "A lot of things fell but everything looks all right."

Vice Consul in San Juan Ceferino Díaz Bonilla, said the local Dominican community is relatively calm.

"Dozens of people have called asking about their families. Some communication routes are down, but we have been able to communicate with the government there," said the consul, who estimated that more than 100,000 Dominicans live in Puerto Rico.

STAR wire services contributed to this report.



An unidentified woman walks in front of a damaged building in Santiago, 100 miles northwest of Santo Domingo.