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**Magnitude 5.2 earthquake shakes Virgin Islands
Four temblors rattle dishes and nerves
By JOY BLACKBURN
Tuesday, August 15th 2006**

An earthquake with a magnitude of at least 5.0 rattled nerves across the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico on Monday morning, but no damage was reported.

The 9:09 a.m. temblor - the second of three that occurred within hours of each other Monday morning in the same vicinity - was centered in the ocean about 29 miles northwest of Anegada, at 19 north latitude, 64.4 west longitude.

A fourth quake shook the islands at 9:30 p.m., a 4.5 magnitude jolt that was centered 32 miles northwest of Anegada.

The U.S. Geological Survey's National Earthquake Information Center assigned the 9:09 quake a preliminary magnitude of 5.0. The Puerto Rico Seismic Network later revised its measure of the tremor's magnitude up to 5.2.

The quake's center was about 13.2 miles below the sea. It was felt across the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, as well as eastern Puerto Rico. The Seismic Network received isolated reports from people who felt the temblor as far away as Mayaguez, in the western part of the commonwealth, said Christa von Hillebrandt, director of the Puerto Rico Seismic Network.

In the British Virgin Islands, Monday marked the start of the 2006 Earthquake and Tsunami Awareness campaign, launched by the Department of Disaster Management.

"The earthquake reminded the community of the BVI's vulnerability to the earthquake hazard," said Natasha Lettsome, information training manager.

Harold Baker, state director of the U.S. Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency, said he received a single phone call from "a curious resident" but no reports of damage.

The quake was one of four centered in the same area - the Sombrero Fault Zone - on Monday. A 3.7 magnitude quake, which turned out to be a precursor, was recorded at 5:19 a.m. Monday, von Hillebrandt said. A 3.6 magnitude aftershock was recorded at 10:31 a.m., she said.

Magnitude describes the amount of energy released by the earthquake. Another measure - the intensity - estimates the strength of ground shaking at any particular location, using a I to X Roman numeral scale. On this scale, I indicates that no shaking was felt and no damage occurred, and X indicates "extreme" shaking and very heavy damage.

The National Earthquake Information Center, through the "Did You Feel It? Tell Us" link on its website, had by Monday evening received 193 e-mailed reports from the public on the quake. Based on that information, the quake was given a maximum intensity of IV, which designates light shaking and no damage.

On St. Thomas and St. John, the average intensity was IV. The responses from St. Croix indicated an average intensity of III - weak shaking and no damage. Reports from across Puerto Rico indicated the average intensity ranged from I to IV.

Von Hillebrandt said the Puerto Rico Seismic Network received 400 e-mailed reports from residents.

- Daily News BVI Correspondent Angela Burns-Piper contributed to this report. Contact Joy Blackburn at 774-8772 ext. 303 or e-mail blackburn@dailynews.vi.

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Monday's Earthquake Brings Up Need for Tsunami Warning System

by Lynda Lohr

Aug. 14, 2006 - Ricky Blackwood was sitting in his chair at the Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center on St. John on Monday when a magnitude 5.2 earthquake hit at 9:09 a.m.

"I felt the chair moving," he said.

The earthquake was strong enough to shake houseplant leaves and send cats skittering for safety during the many seconds it took to subside.

On the North Side of St. Thomas residents were also scrambling for safety during the quake that was accompanied by an audible rumbling.

"It was a relatively long event," said Walter Bostwick from his East End St. Thomas office at the time of the quake. Bostwick said he noticed it build and then peak and then subside.

It was also felt on St. Croix.

The earthquake was centered 29 miles northwest of Anegada and located 13 miles under the sea floor.

According to the Puerto Rico Seismic Network's Web site, no damage was reported.

So far in August, the Seismic Network reported 50 earthquakes in the region, with three listed for Monday. This was the strongest one to date.

Since Jan. 1, the region has experienced 1,387 earthquakes.

In 2005, the number stood at 1,087.

Seismic Network Director Christa G. von Hillebrandt-Andrade said Monday there is no cause for immediate alarm. She said the numbers are up because there is an increase in seismic activity this year, but the agency also has improved its seismic monitoring. She said there are now stations running continuously in Anegada, Tortola, St. Thomas and St. Croix that record smaller earthquakes previously not felt by the Puerto Rico facility's equipment.

However, she said that the Seismic Network needs to increase its capabilities even further in order to provide round-the-clock monitoring seven days a week. Currently, staff is on duty at the Mayaguez, P.R., facility only during normal working hours.

Hillebrandt-Andrade said this will take funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which she said is dragging its feet. "There's a huge fight going on in NOAA," she said.

She said that the region needs an earthquake and tsunami warning system with the same capabilities as the one in Hawaii, and that currently, the region must depend on stateside monitoring facilities to put out an alert if the region gets an earthquake during nonworking hours.

"But in an emergency, we'll be getting so much more information," she said of the Puerto Rico facility.

Hillebrandt-Andrade said the information gathered at the Seismic

Amberland / Marade said the information gathered at the Seismic Network could alert islands throughout the Caribbean in case a tsunami was on the way.

She said the agency got 300 e-mails Monday after residents felt the 5.2 magnitude quake. She said lots of them were asking whether the area was in danger of being hit with a tsunami.

While there was no danger on Monday, she urged the region's residents to pay attention in case one hits that could cause a tsunami.

And she urged them to contact Delegate to Congress Donna M. Christensen to pressure NOAA into funding a round-the-clock earthquake monitoring facility for the region.