

Emergency agency activates islandwide tsunami drill

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The State Emergency Management Agency (AEMEAD for its Spanish acronym) will coordinate a multi-agency training exercise of a tsunami affecting Puerto Rico on Thursday, April 2, Heriberto Saurí, executive director of the agency announced Wednesday.

The drill will allow for assessment of response plans, increase readiness and improve interagency coordination should a real tsunami hit the island, he added.

"Puerto Rico is located in a seismically active area and there is historic evidence on the effects a tsunami could have on our population. Therefore, we are coordinating this response exercise with several municipalities, local and federal agencies, and local radio and TV stations," Saurí said.

The drill, named LANTEX 09, will mock an 8.6 (Richter) earthquake occurring some 65 miles northeast off the coast of Fajardo, and generating a tsunami up to seven meters high. The exercise will simulate an extended tsunami warning for all the eastern and gulf coast states of the United States, the US

Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

"This is the first time such an exercise will take place," Saurí said.

Christa Von Hillerbrandt, director of the Puerto Rico Seismic Network, pointed that during the exercise the island will be under the highest alert level for flooding due to a tsunami.

"It would take as little as 15 to 20 minutes for a tsunami caused by such an earthquake to reach the island's coasts. And contrary to popular believe, the biggest waves would not be affecting Fajardo, but Aguadilla," Hillerbrandt assured.

Both, Saurí and Hillerbrandt, stressed that the earliest warning would be the earthquake itself.

"A quake of this magnitude will produce violent shaking, probably lasting for several seconds. After the shaking, people living in coastal areas should start evacuating their homes and head for higher ground," Hillerbrandt explained.

In terms of evacuation plans, there are two alternatives; people could move out of their homes following designated routes, or those living in condos could move to higher floors (above the third) to weather the disaster.

To explain the devastating power of the waves, the scientist said a five foot wave



Daily Sun/Francesca Von Rabenau-O'Reilly

Christa Von Hillerbrandt, director of the Puerto Rico Seismic Network says it can take as little as 15 to 20 minutes for a tsunami to reach local coasts after it is triggered by an earthquake. She is accompanied by AEMEAD Director Heriberto Saurí.

entering any coastal area has the same destructive power of 150 mph hurricane winds, and could reach several hundred meters inland.

AEMEAD's director assured his agency has contacted several communities on the municipalities where the drill will take place, in order for them to participate in the exercise, but could not anticipate how many civilians will be taking part of it.

"There will be some mobilization of victims during the exercise but only in those municipalities already certified as tsunami ready. This drill is designed to measure the effectiveness of our response agencies, should

a tsunami occurred," he stated.

Even though Puerto Rico is in a seismically active area, only three of its 44 coastal municipalities (Dorado, Mayagüez and Lajas) are certified as tsunami ready by federal agencies. But Saurí pointed out that "Añasco, Rincón, Vega Alta and Carolina are in the process of getting there tsunami ready certifications."

"We expect to complete this exercise and be ready in case of an emergency of this nature affects us. It is only by training and practicing for these events that we can truly be ready," Hillerbrandt said.

UPR owes retirees \$230M

BY CYBERNEWS WIRE SERVICE

The University of Puerto Rico has a debt with the UPR Retirees Association of more than \$230 million because of both lack of payment and changes to the fee formula for current employees, the president of the organization, Aureo Andino Figueras, told lawmakers Wednesday.

That figure goes only through 2005, he testified in a hearing of the House Public Service Retirement System Committee.

"If we go up to the present it's more," he said.

The UPR Board of Trustees recognized a debt at that time of only \$24 million, and

that it has been reduced to \$6 million, he said.

The committee is considering a bill, authored by New Progressive Party Rep. Lourdes Ramos, to amend the University of Puerto Rico's organic law to create a UPR retirement system board that is separate from the Board of Trustees.

The bill has a "legitimate goal: preventing conflicts of interests," he said.

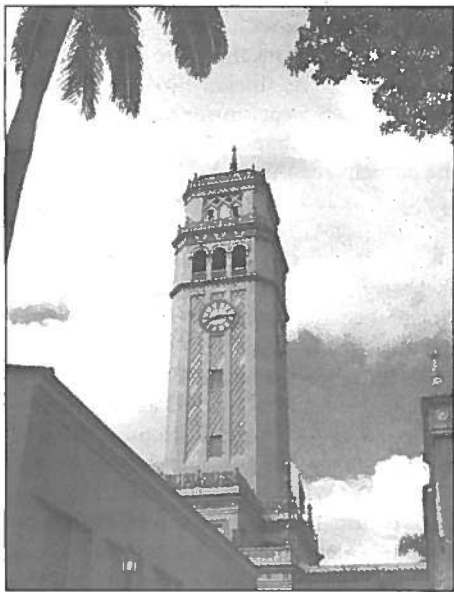
"It should be noted that up to now all the decisions of the UPR Retirement Board are subject to the final approval of the Board of Trustees. That is to say, they can be revoked, altered or overruled," the former professor said. "According to an analysis by the UPR Retirement Board, its fiduciary administration does not meet the best interests of the participants, [either] active or retired, who ultimately benefit from the trust that a retirement fund constitutes."

Under the current system it's up to the trustees to determine whether additional benefits will be awarded to retirees, who have been losing them, he said.

Board of Trustees President Carlos H. Del Río, however, said the bill would "put the very existence of the current university retirement system in grave doubt."

"Not only would the retirement system be orphaned from the legal base that is the foundation of its existence, but the law, according to the proposed amendment, would not include any language that authorizes the creation of a retirement system nor the continuation of the current one," he said.

"Apart from the serious defects in its form and content, it's incongruous with the current legal conception of ... university autonomy."



Daily Sun

University of Puerto Rico

Beaches belong to the people



Daily Sun/Francesca Von Rabenau-O'Reilly

Eirán Gotay, member of the Playas para Todos coalition, stages a protest in front of the San Juan Superior Court on Monday, as a hearing was taking place to address a petition for injunction filed by several organizations against the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources and the Permits and Regulations Administration to stop the construction of a condominium that would impact the beach zone in Punta Las Marías in San Juan. The developers of the Playa Almendro building obtained the permits in 2007 after the DNER invalidated claims by Playas para Todos, saying they had not been presented by an attorney.