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 From the Los Angeles Times

Tsunami threat to L.A., Long Beach ports studied

A major disruption could cost \$1 billion a day for U.S. economy.

By Patrick McGreevy

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

December 14, 2007

SACRAMENTO — Concerned about the threat a tsunami could pose to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, a state agency agreed Thursday to launch a study of potential risk to the busy ports in light of nearly \$10 million in damage caused last year by wild, tsunami-driven currents that hit the harbor of Crescent City.

The study, which will cost the state about \$50,000, is needed because a major disruption to operations at the container ports, the busiest in the country, could cost the national economy \$1 billion a day, said Eddie Bernard, director of the Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

His agency will conduct the study in partnership with the state Seismic Safety Commission.

Bernard said the risk may prove low from tsunamis spawned by earthquakes in the ocean, but the science exists to let port officials know ahead of time whether they would be subject to water surges and damaging currents.

"I think it's clear that from a local tsunami you would have problems, but from a distant tsunami that's an unanswered question," Bernard said.

"Why take a chance, when we have the tools, when we have the technology? Why not explore it?"

Deep-water buoys set up by the NOAA allowed officials to give Crescent City at least six hours warning that it could be affected by a tsunami after a magnitude-8.1 earthquake struck near the Kuril Islands off Russia in November 2006.

Scientists warned that the city of about 7,500 residents just south of the Oregon border would be flooded by a surge of water.

No flood occurred, but currents spawned by the tsunami action roiled the harbor, damaging boats and piers.

The incident spooked residents who could recall when Crescent City was struck by a tsunami in 1964 following an earthquake in Alaska. The Northern California town suffered 11 fatalities and saw 289 homes and businesses destroyed by massive swells.

Computer modeling technology has allowed the NOAA to demonstrate how tsunami actions affect other ports, including Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, by showing where flooding and other wave damage were likely to occur, Bernard said.

patrick.mcgreevy@latimes.com

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