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Southern Taiwan most vulnerable to tsunamis: study

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The southwest and northeast coasts of the country are the most vulnerable to tsunamis in the event of a strong underwater earthquake occurring in the South China Sea, according to the results of a study released yesterday.

Regions that are considered at high risk include the shoreline between Hengchun (恆春) and Tainan in the south as well as Lotung (羅東) and Suao (蘇澳) in northeastern Iland County, the study shows.

The study was conducted by Wu Tso-ren (吳祚任), an assistant professor at National Central University's Institute of Hydrological Sciences.

Wu reported the results of his study during the South China Sea Tsunami Workshop 2007 held by the Academia Sinica's Institute of Earth Sciences.

Tsunamis are usually caused by undersea earthquakes measuring at least 7.2 in magnitude that have a focal depth no deeper than 30km.

If the South China Sea experiences an undersea earthquake with a magnitude similar to that of the Dec. 26, 2004, Indian Ocean earthquake near the Indonesian island of Sumatra, a tsunami 8m to 10m high is likely to hit Hengchun approximately one hour after the quake, and Lotung and Suao are likely to see a tsunami 6m to 8m high, Wu said.

Referring to a report by the US Geological Survey assessing the potential risk a tsunami source along the Pacific subduction zones, Wu noted that the Luzon trench has been identified as a high risk zone, while the Ryukyu trench and the North Sulawesi trench have been identified as medium risk zones.

The report says these subduction zones can rupture and generate large tsunamis that will have a significant impact on the countries in the South China region.

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