



INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION  
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МЕЖПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВЕННАЯ ОКЕАНОГРАФИЧЕСКАЯ КОМИССИЯ  
اللجنة الدولية الحكومية لعلوم المحيطات  
政府间海洋学委员会

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**IOC Circular Letter No. 2535**  
(Available in English only)

IOC/WWW/TA/BA  
4 September 2014

- To :** ICG/PTWS Tsunami Warning Focal Points (TWFP)  
ICG/PTWS Tsunami National Contacts (TNC)  
ICG/PTWS Chair and Vice-Chairs
- cc. :** Official National Coordinating Body for liaison with IOC in IOC Member States  
Permanent Delegations/Observer Missions to UNESCO of IOC Member States  
National Commissions for UNESCO in IOC Member States  
Directors of UNESCO and IOC Regional Offices in the Asia/Pacific Region  
Regional Organizations cooperating with UNESCO/IOC  
Director, Pacific Tsunami Warning Center  
Director Northwest Pacific Tsunami Advisory Center/ Japan Meteorological Agency  
Director, International Tsunami Information Center

**Object :** **Start of Issuance of PTWC Enhanced Products for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (PTWS) by 0000 UTC on 1 October 2014**

Through [Circular Letter 2460](#), dated 7 December 2012, we announced the beginning of the trial period for the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) Enhanced Products, as recommended by the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG/PTWS) at its 24<sup>th</sup> session in May 2011.

Through [Circular Letter 2481](#), dated 28 March 2013, we announced the beginning of the issuance of PTWC Enhanced Products in trial experimental mode starting on 15 April 2013.

Through this Circular Letter we inform that **starting 0000 UTC on 1 October 2014**, the PTWC will **retire its existing products and start issuance of its new Enhanced Products to the designated PTWS Tsunami Warning Focal Points (TWFP<sup>1</sup>)**.

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<sup>1</sup> According to decision EC-XLVII, Dec.3.2.1 of the 47<sup>th</sup> IOC Executive Council, an ICG Tsunami Warning Focal Point (TWFP) is "a 24x7 point of contact (office, operational unit or position, not a person) officially designated by the National Tsunami Warning Centre (NTWC) or the government to receive and disseminate tsunami information from an ICG Tsunami Service Provider according to established National Standard Operating Procedures. The TWFP may or not be the NTWC."

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There are important differences between PTWC's former and its new Enhanced Products. Existing products use terminology that describes a level of alert for each country. Specifically, a country is currently designated by PTWC as being in a Tsunami Watch or a Tsunami Warning depending upon the tsunami threat presented by the event, as well as the time remaining until tsunami impact. Over the last several years, however, use of the Warning and Watch terms have caused confusion when the PTWC-designated levels of alert conflict with a country's independently-derived levels of alert. As each country is sovereign and thus responsible for the safety of its own population, the PTWC new products will now change to avoid using the Warning and Watch terms, and instead provide forecast levels of impact along coasts.

The levels of expected impact will be provided as expected maximum tsunami wave amplitudes relative to the tide within four categories which are: (i) less than 0.3 m; (ii) 0.3 to less than 1 m; (iii) 1 m to 3 m; and (iv) greater than 3 m. A fifth category will be 'no threat computed' to reflect locations where a forecast has not been made. With this change, the designation of alert levels, such as a Tsunami Warning, will then become the sole responsibility of the National Tsunami Warning Centres.

To support TWFPs and NTWCs the complete *User's Guide for the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center Enhanced Products for the Pacific Tsunami Warning System* has just been released as IOC Technical Series, 105 Revised Edition, and is enclosed with this letter. The Spanish version for this Guide will be available by the end of September 2014.

The PTWC new products will consist of both improved text products, and graphical products (examples in Appendix II of the *User's Guide* enclosed). The text products include improvements in the order and type of information provided, and in its readability. The graphical products provide more information at a much greater level of detail than is possible using only text products. They include maps that show the forecast directionality of the tsunami energy, the forecast position of the initial wave through time, as well as the expected maximum wave amplitudes offshore and at the coast. The graphical products may also be helpful for communicating the threat quickly and clearly when time is of the essence. Further National Tsunami Warning Centre (NTWC) guidance on the use of these products is given in section 5 and in Appendix VI of the *User's Guide*.

Per Recommendation ICG/PTWS-XXV.2 of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for PTWS, Member States decided that the text bulletins will be made available to the public, while the scientifically more complex graphical products should only be disseminated via secure channels to Tsunami Warning Focal Points (TWFPs) for use by National Tsunami Warning Centres (NTWCs) in order to minimize potential confusion and misinterpretation by the public.

Accordingly, the Text Product will be a public product disseminated through the existing PTWC message communication channels, and the graphical products will only be sent to designated IOC Tsunami Warning Focal Points.

The background to these changes is the following. At its 22<sup>nd</sup> Session, the ICG/PTWS (2007) started the process of improving the PTWS international alert products, starting first with the products of the PTWC. At its 24<sup>th</sup> Session, the ICG/PTWS (May 2011) approved PTWC's Enhanced Tsunami Products proposal and asked them to proceed with their development. Exercise Pacific Wave 2011 (November) introduced those products and the ICG/PTWS Steering Committee (SC) met in May 2012 to review the feedback and approve the final implementation timeline. Exercise Pacific Wave 2013 (April) was conducted to validate the products. At the 25<sup>th</sup> Session of the ICG/PTWS (September 2013), Member States approved the final products and agreed on the target changeover date of 1 October 2014 proposed by the PTWS Steering Committee (SC). Member States further decided that the public text product will continue, and that additional forecast guidance products be only sent to country Tsunami Warning Focal Points to assist them in assessing their national threat. In July 2014, the PTWS SC met to perform the final readiness review and approved the full operation start date. Starting 0000 UTC on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014, the PTWC will retire its existing products and start issuance of its new Enhanced Products.

PTWC's New Enhanced Product suite was first issued in an experimental phase starting 15 April 2013, in parallel with PTWC's existing products in order to familiarize recipients – the designated national Tsunami Warning Focal Points (TWFPs) – with the new products' timing and content. This introduction and familiarization period also provided lead time for training on the new products and for countries to incorporate the necessary changes to their TWFP and National Tsunami Warning Centre (NTWC) Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

It is important to note that while the new products and the procedures behind them represent a significant improvement over the current ones, there will still be limitations that need to be recognized and understood by every country, and especially by their National Tsunami Warning Centres.

Considering the reinforced role of Tsunami Warning Focal Points (TWFPs), we invite all Member States to make sure their TWFPs are up-to-date and their contact details have been received by the Secretariat. For any inquiry on this matter please contact the Technical Secretary of the ICG/PTWS, Mr Bernardo Aliaga at the email address [b.aliaga@unesco.org](mailto:b.aliaga@unesco.org).

Yours sincerely,

*[signed]*

Wendy Watson-Wright  
Executive Secretary, IOC

Enclosure: User's Guide for the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center Enhanced Products for the Pacific Tsunami Warning System, August 2014 (IOC Technical Series, 105, Revised Edition) --  
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002203/220368e.pdf>