UNESCO-IOC / NOAA ITIC Training Program in Hawaii (ITP-TEWS Hawaii)
TSUNAMI EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS
AND THE PACIFIC TSUNAMI WARNING CENTER (PTWC) ENHANCED PRODUCTS
TSUNAMI EVACUATION PLANNING AND UNESCO IOC TSUNAMI READY PROGRAMME
15-26 September 2025, Honolulu, Hawaii

unesco
Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission

TWC Operations
Sea Level Monitoring – Instruments, Limitations, Challenges

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Pacific Community
Communauté du Pacifique

Why Sea Level Gauges are Needed

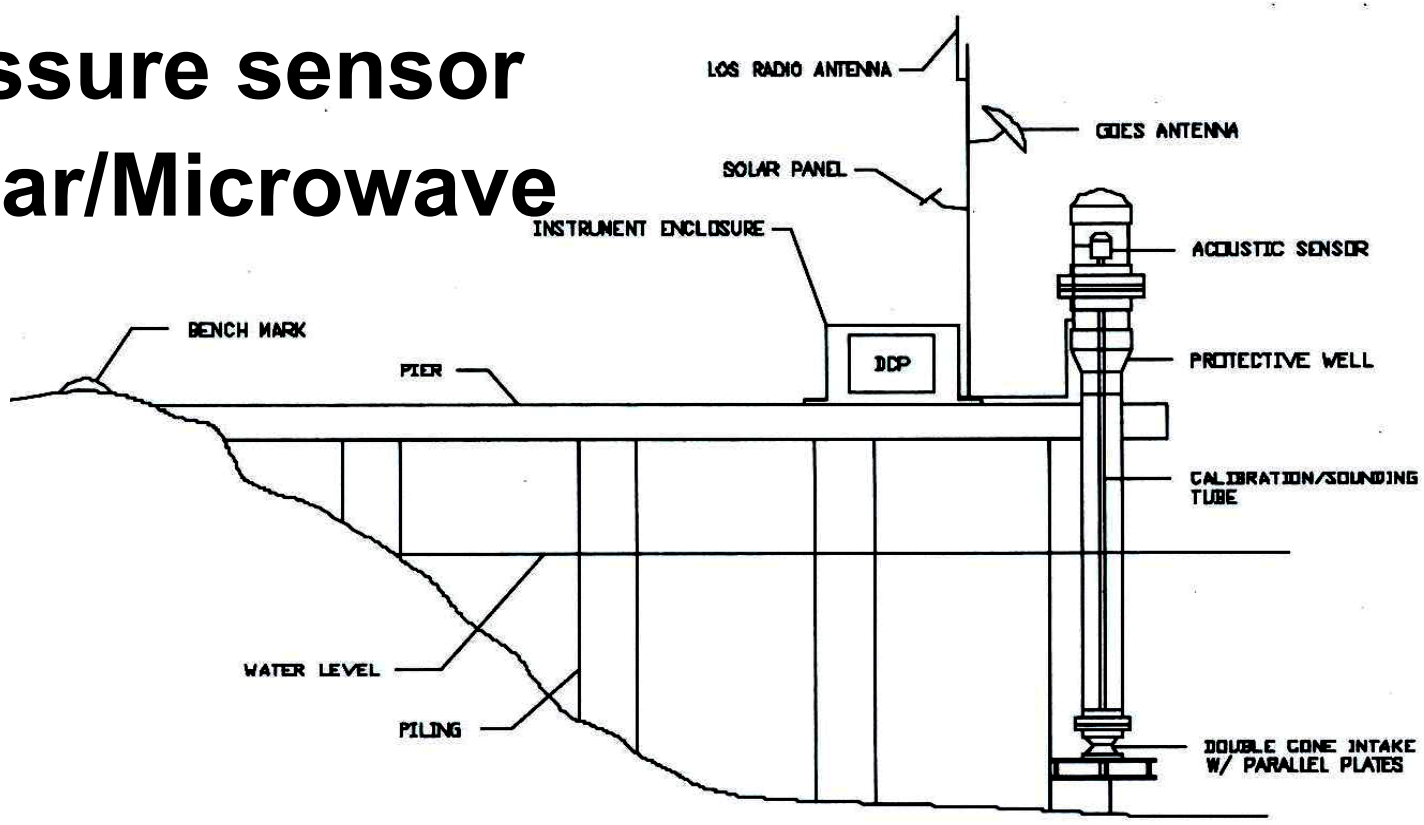
- **To verify if a tsunami exists or not**
- **To measure tsunami size for decision-making**
  - Compare with historical data
  - Constrain forecast model
- **To aid in response**
  - How bad was it?
  - Is it safe to go in?

Two Basic Types of Sea Level Gauges

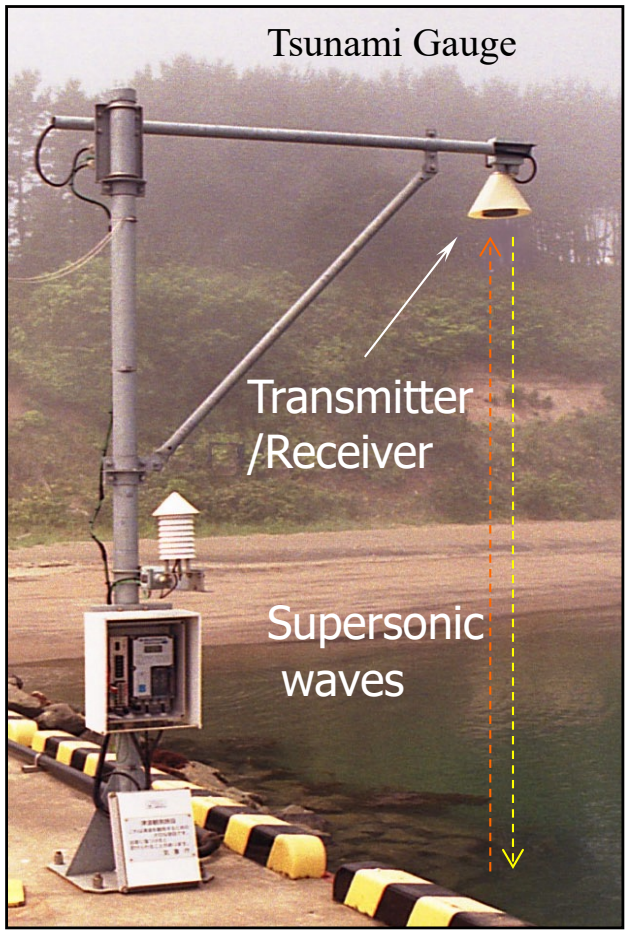
- **Coastal**
  - Good for comparison with historic events
  - Observation at coast
    Used to authoritatively cancel events
  - Heights sensitive to local effects (coastal shape, bathymetry, etc)
- **Deep Ocean**
  - Best for constraining forecast models. Heights not affected by local effects –'pure' tsunami signal
  - Observations in deep water. Not likely to be destroyed by wave
  - Forecast models required to interpret deep-ocean observations

Typical Coastal Gauge

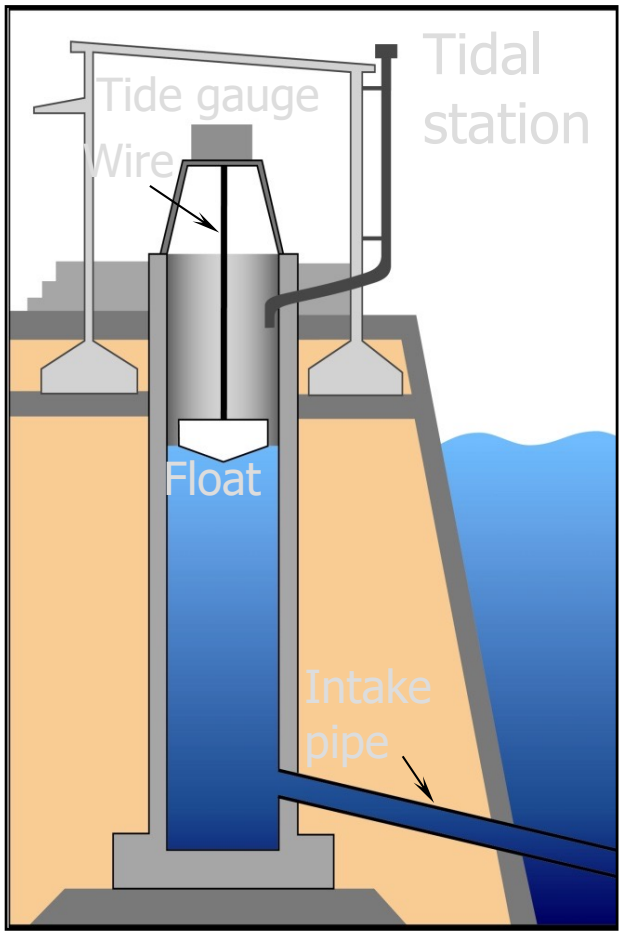
- Mechanical level
- Acoustic sensor
- Pressure sensor
- Radar/Microwave



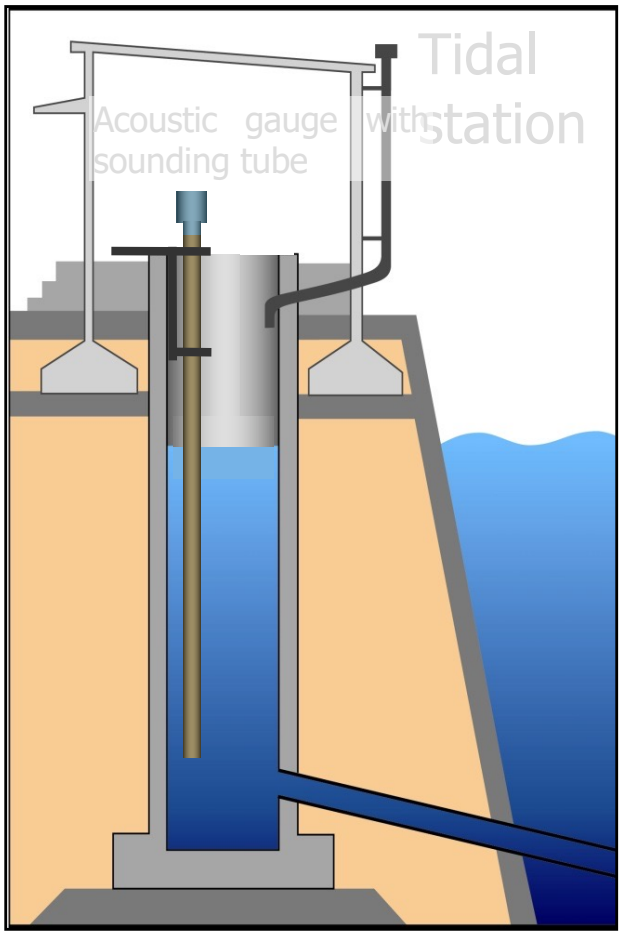
Tidal observation equipment in JMA



Microwave/Radar
in the Open Air



Float gauge
in the Stilling Well

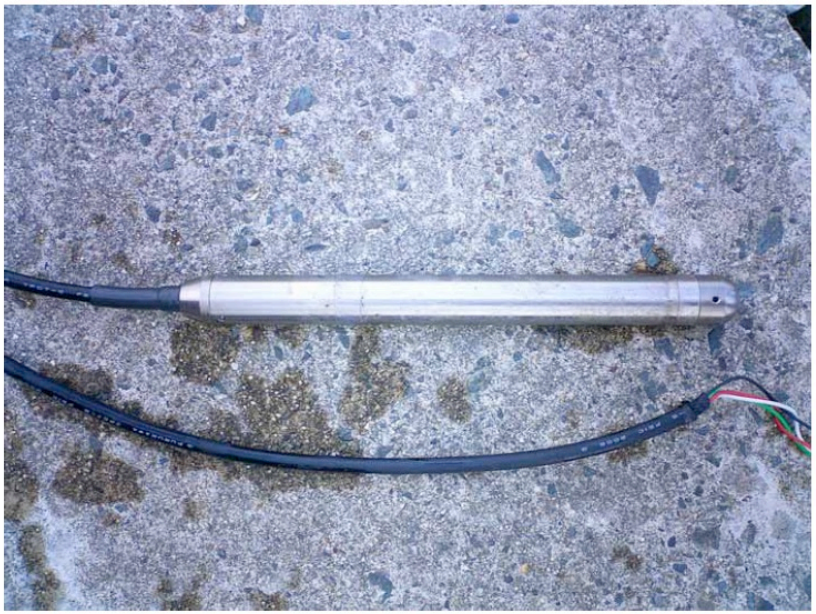


Acoustic gauge
with Sounding Tube

Instruments

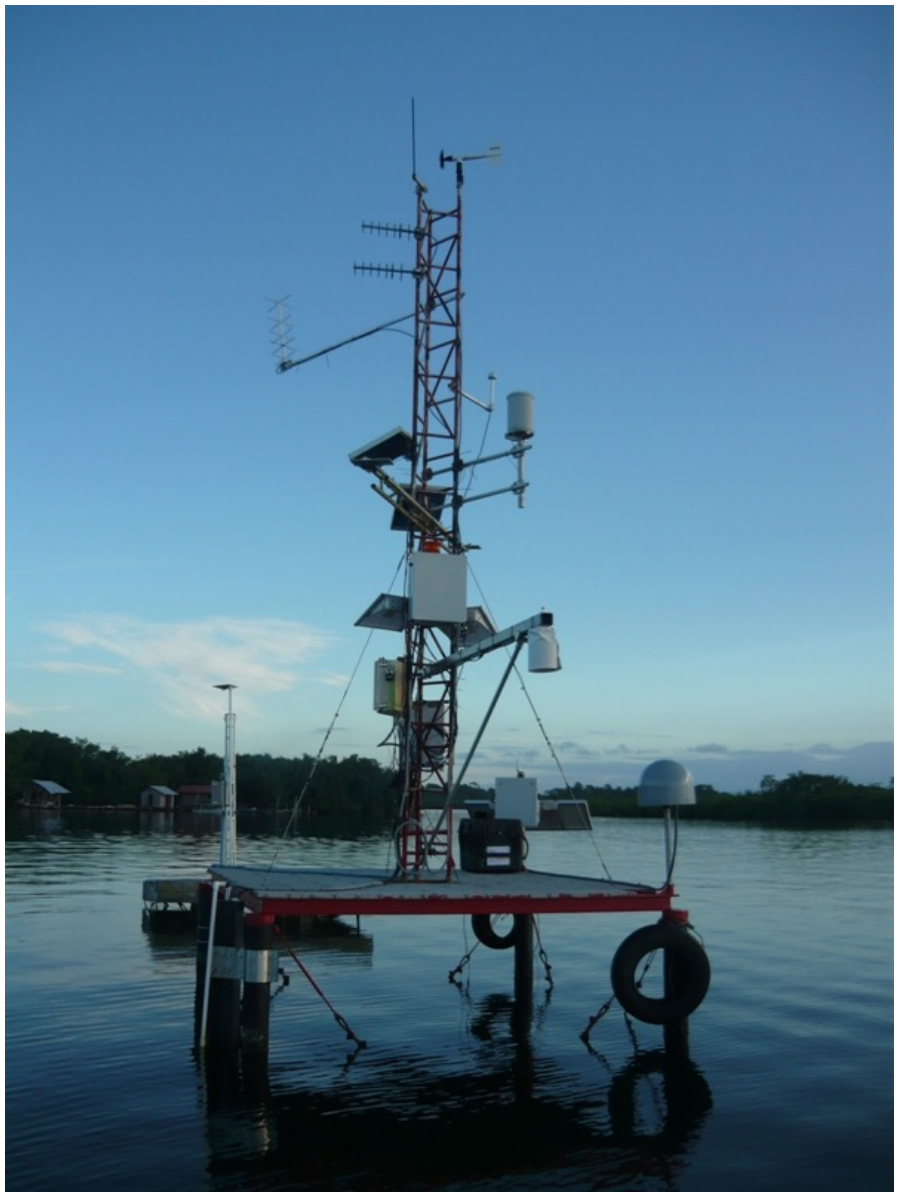
Fuess type gauge

Microwave/
Radar
gauge



Pressure sensor

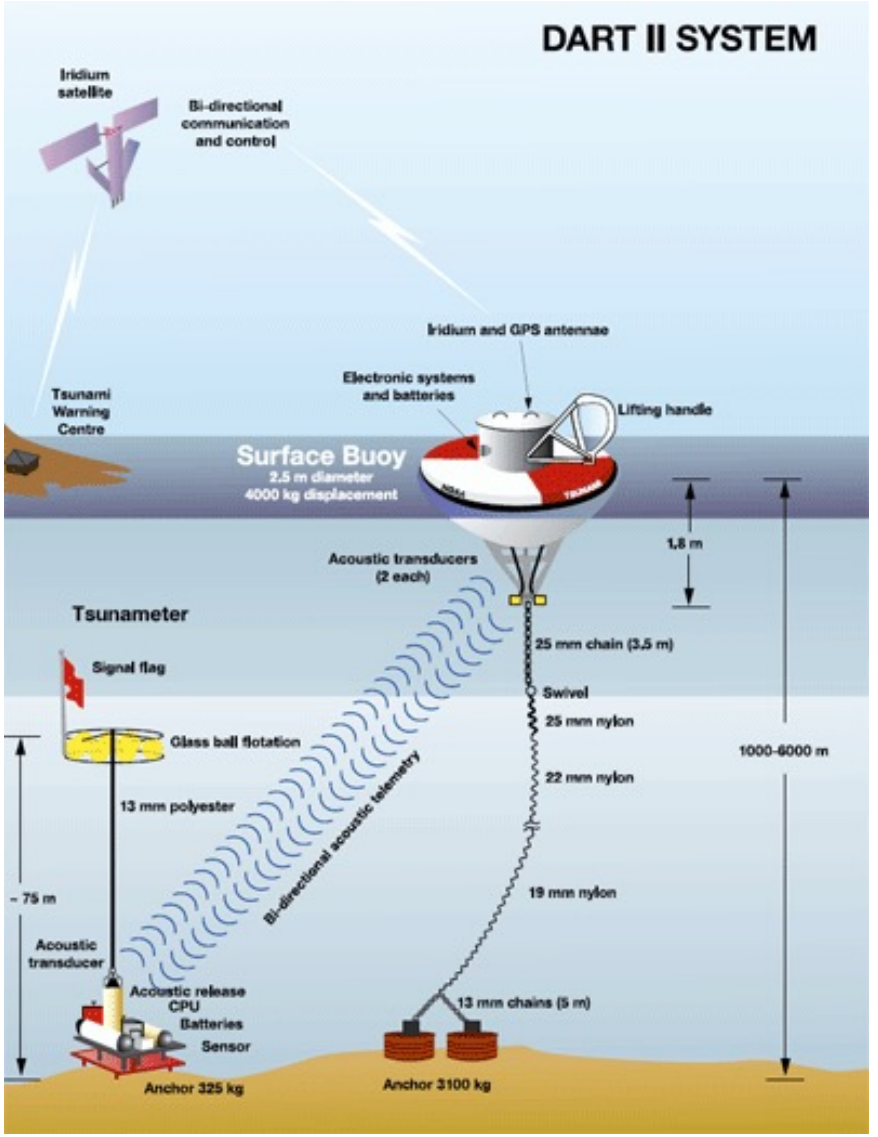
Examples of Caribbean Stations



Example of Stations in the Caribbean

Deep-Ocean Gauge

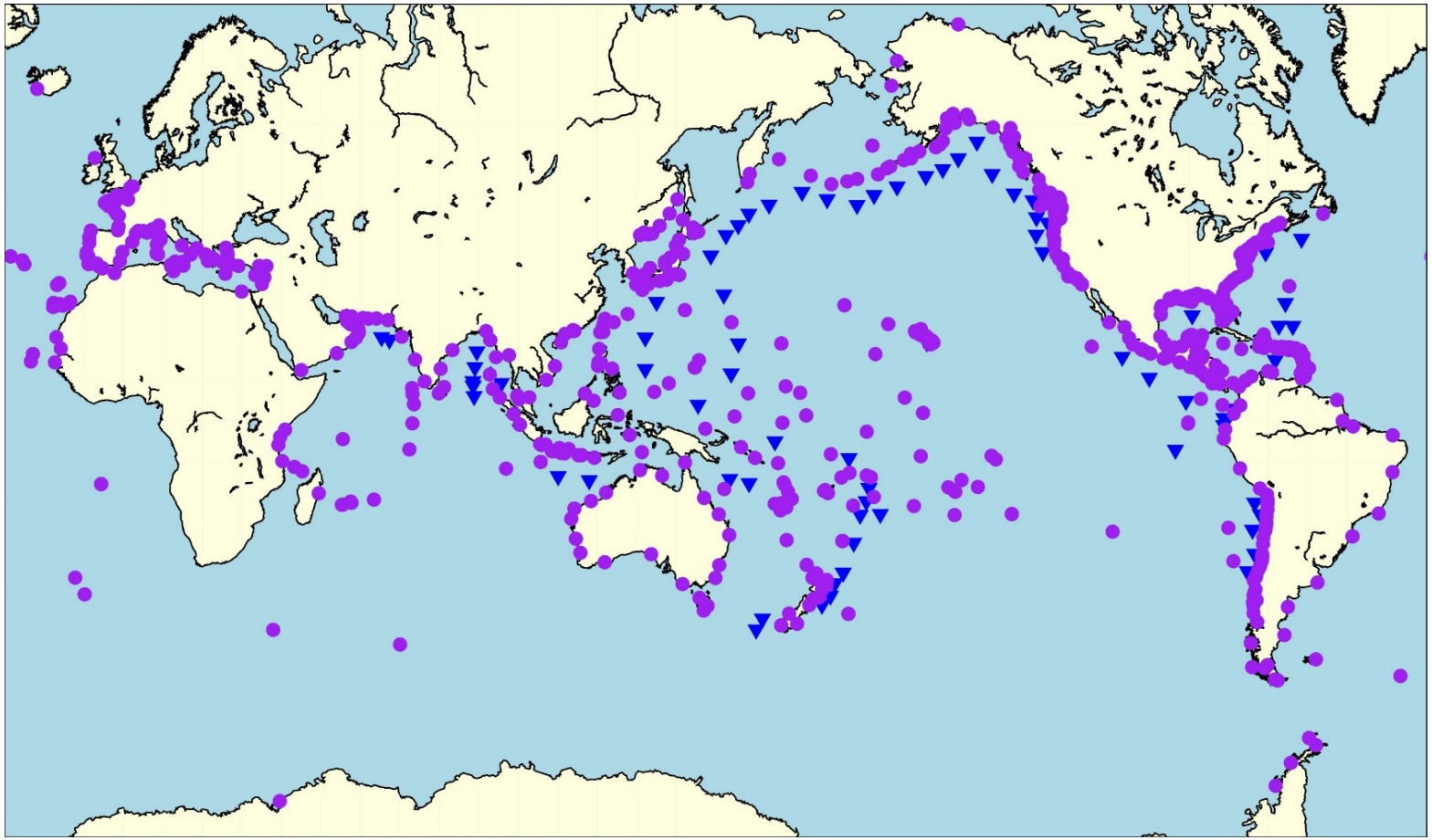
The tsunami signal is detected by a pressure sensor on the ocean floor. That signal is relayed by acoustic telemetry to the buoy. The buoy in turn transmits the signal via satellite back to the warning centers.



Sea Level Network Monitored by U.S. TWCs

Coastal Station

Deep-Ocean Station



In case of big Tsunami?

Sea Level Gauge Data Streams

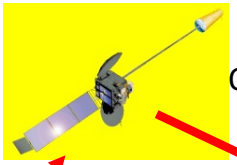
- **Sample Rates**
  - 15s — Optimal For TWS
  - **1 minute** — Good For TWS
  - 2 minute — OK For TWS
  - 6 minute — Can be Used
  - 15 minute — Not useful for TWS
- **Transmission Rates**
  - Real-time — Optimal
  - 3-6 minute — Very Good
  - 15 minute — Good
  - 1 hour — Poor
  - 3 hours — Not useful

Concept of the Tidal Data Collection System using the Geostationary Satellite of USA

Acoustic gauge

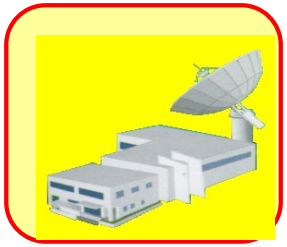
Pressure sensor

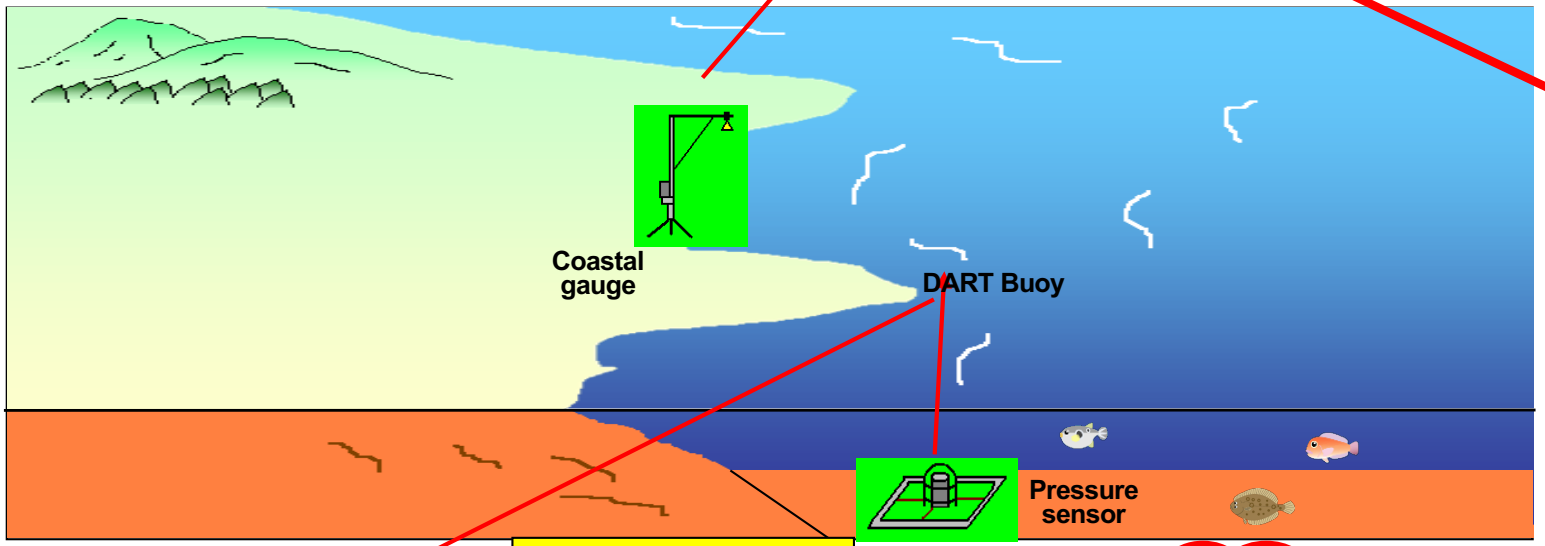
Transmission of Data
- Transmission Interval:
  5 min., 6 min, 15 min or 1 hour.
- Transmission Period:
  Within 1 min



GOES

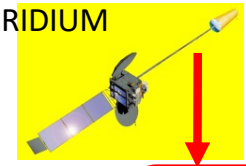
Acquisition of Tidal Data
1.6 GHz band





NOAA NESDIS – Wallops Island

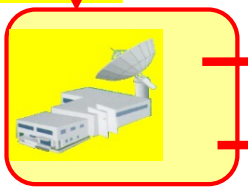
IRIDIUM



IOC Sea Level Monitoring Facility

Met Services

GTS)



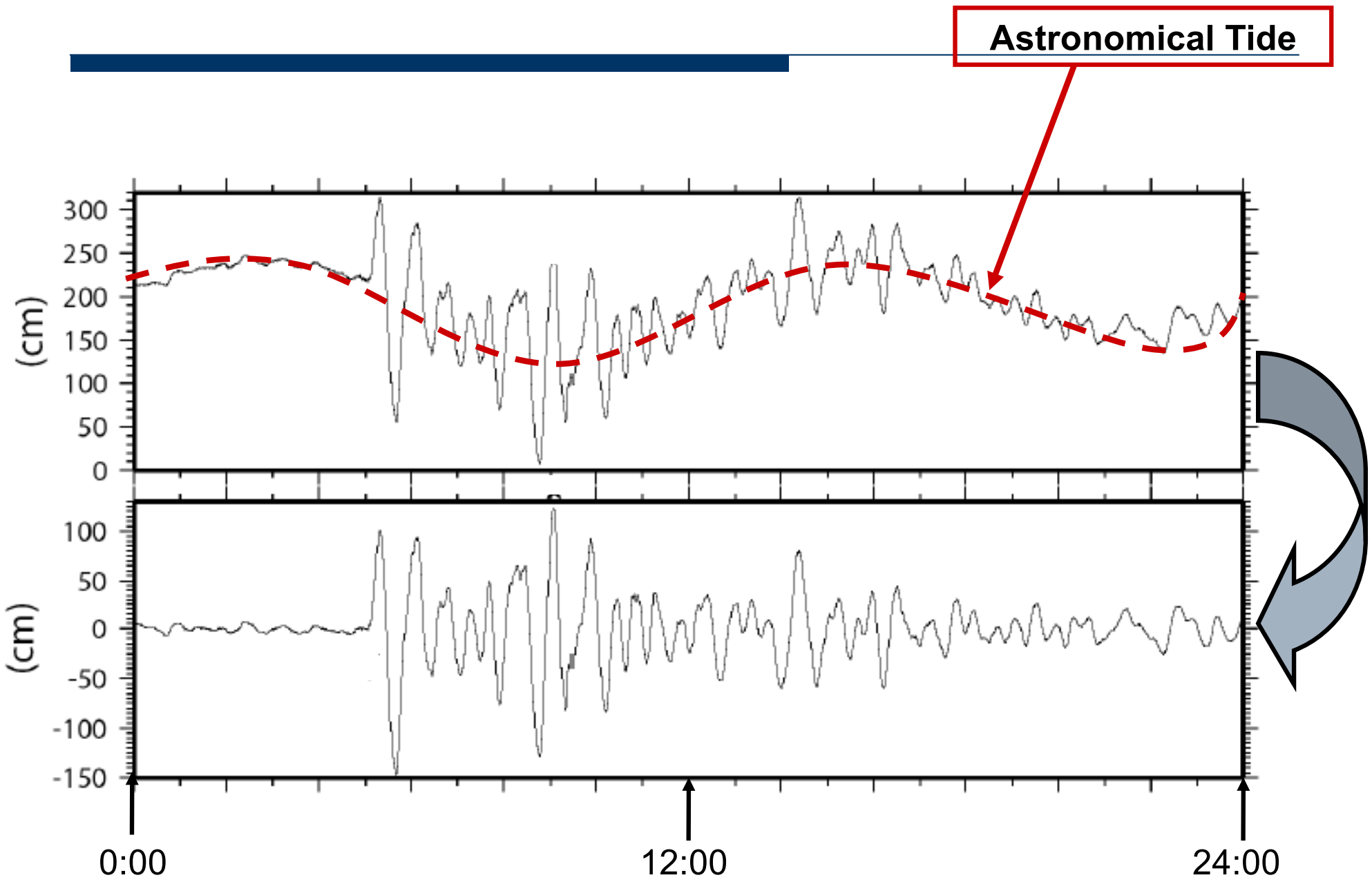
NOAA Data Buoy Center

US NTWC

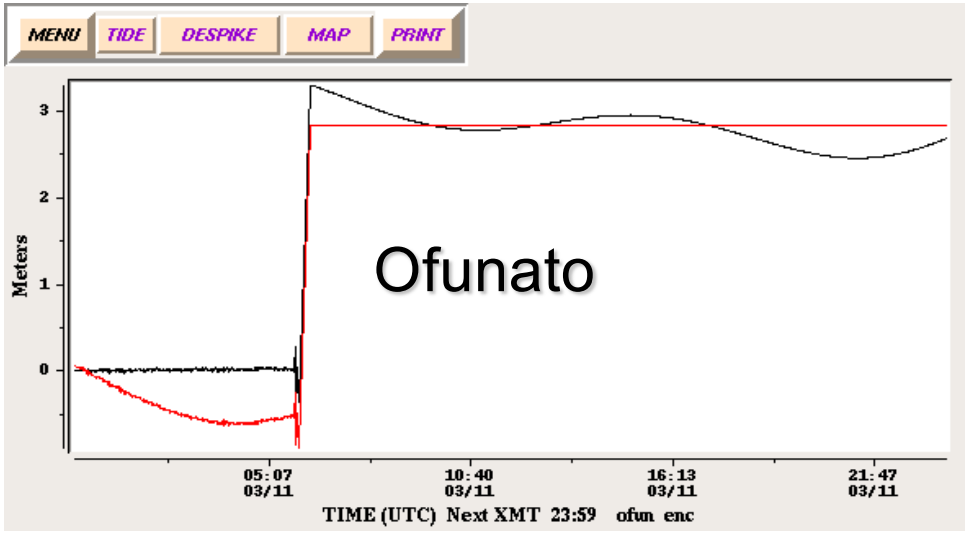
PTWC

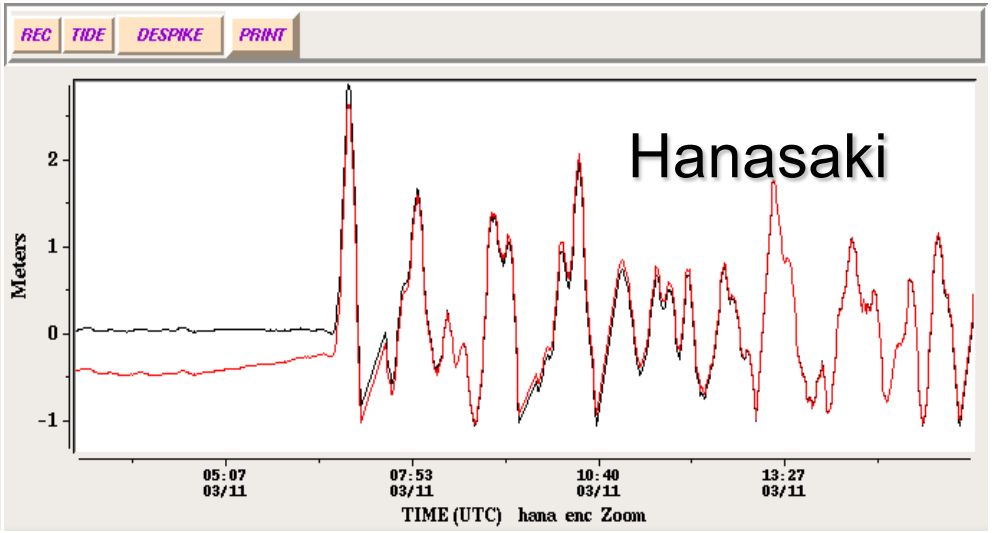
NOAA PORT

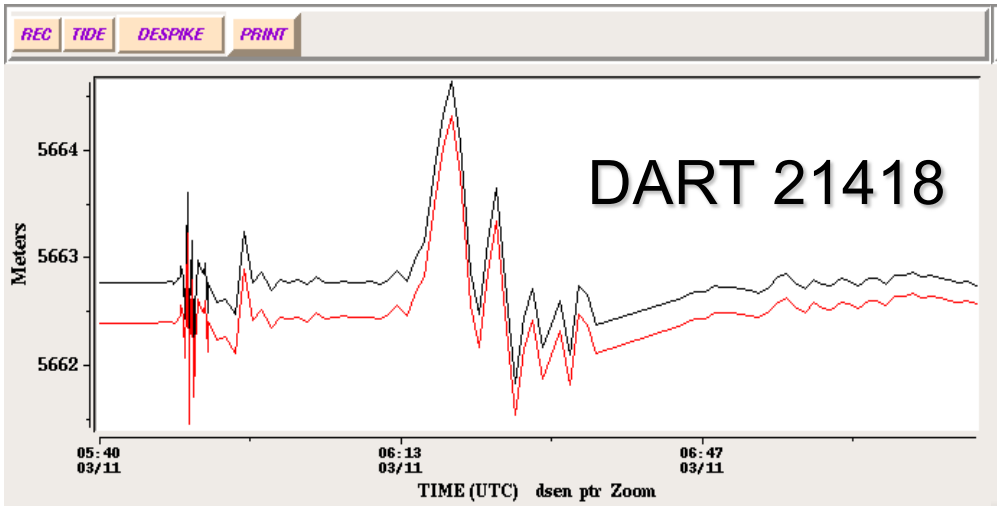
Removal of Astronomical Tide Signal

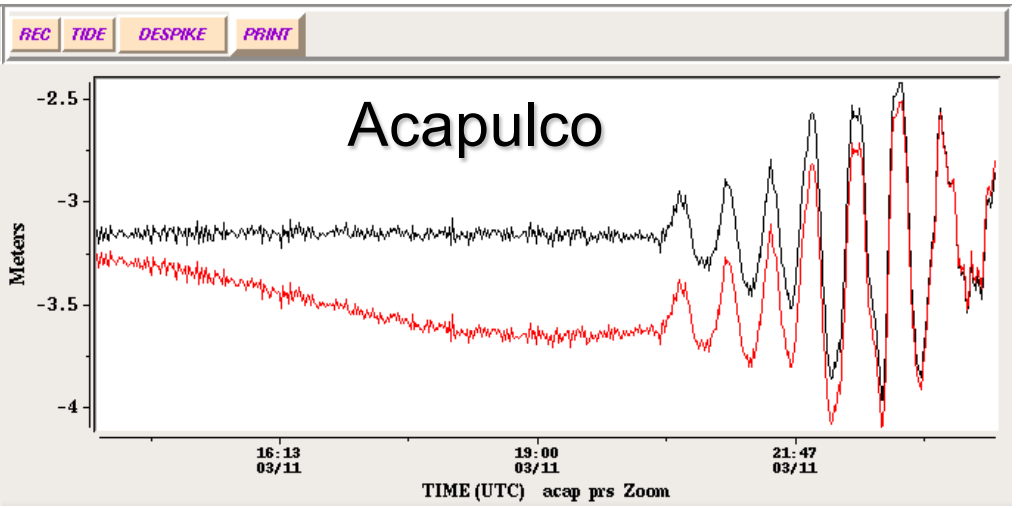


Tohoku Tsunami Marigrams



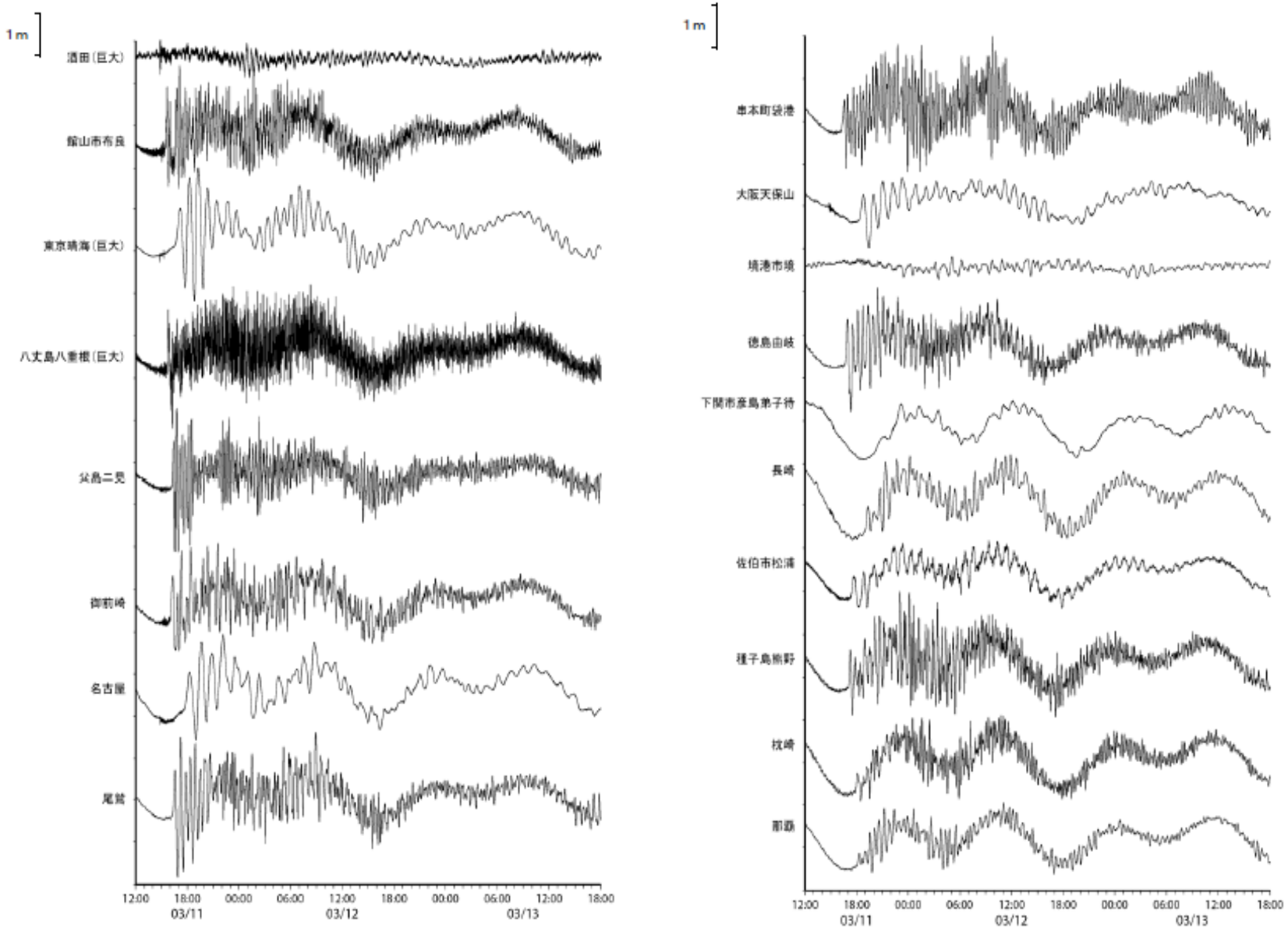






2 days tsunami records - 2011

(Western part of Japan)



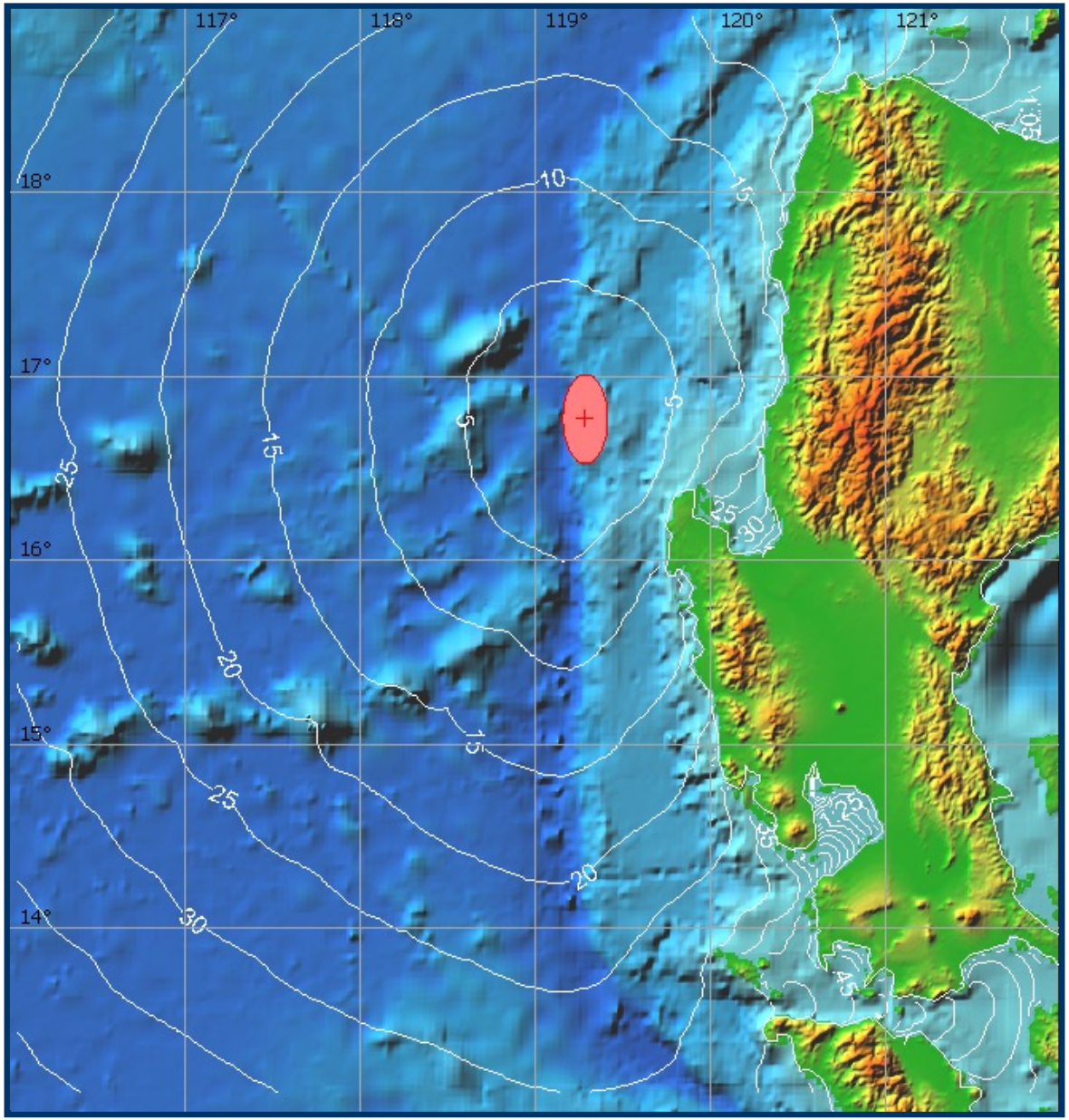
Limitations of Sea Level Data Analysis

- **Type of Sea Level Measurements**
  - Coastal Gauge
    - Most common
    - **Signal highly modified by coastal effects**
    - **May be destroyed by large tsunami**
  - Deep Ocean Gauge
    - Less common
    - Most expensive
    - **Pure tsunami signal to constrain forecast**
  - Wet Sensor
    - On land
    - Less expensive
    - Only indicate if flooding has occurred

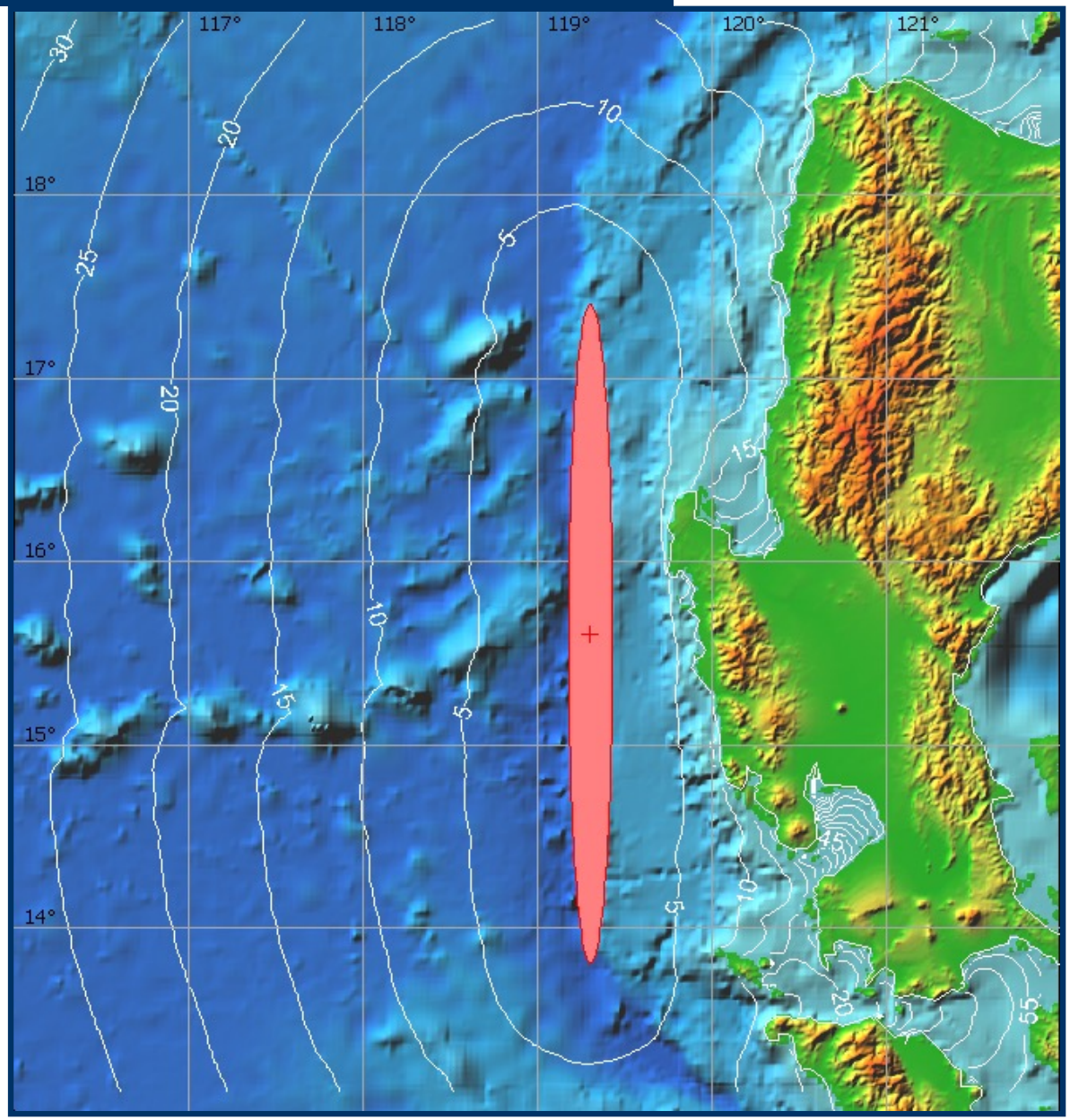
Limitations of Tsunami Forecasting

- **Estimated Arrival Time Forecast**
  - Based on initial seismic analysis
  - Point source or assumed finite fault
- **Initial Threat Level Forecast**
  - Based only on initial seismic analysis and general geophysical/oceanographic contraints
  - Least accurate
- **Sea Level Constrained Forecast**
  - Too late for local tsunami
  - Deep ocean measurements best constraint
  - More accurate

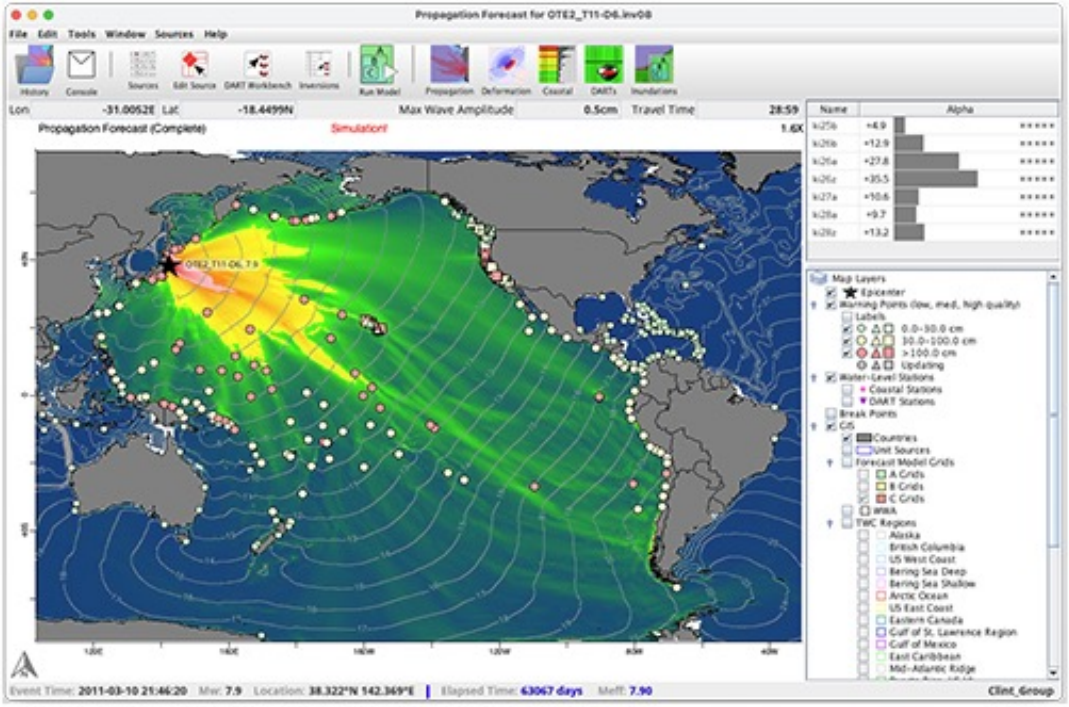
Tsunami Travel Times from Small Source

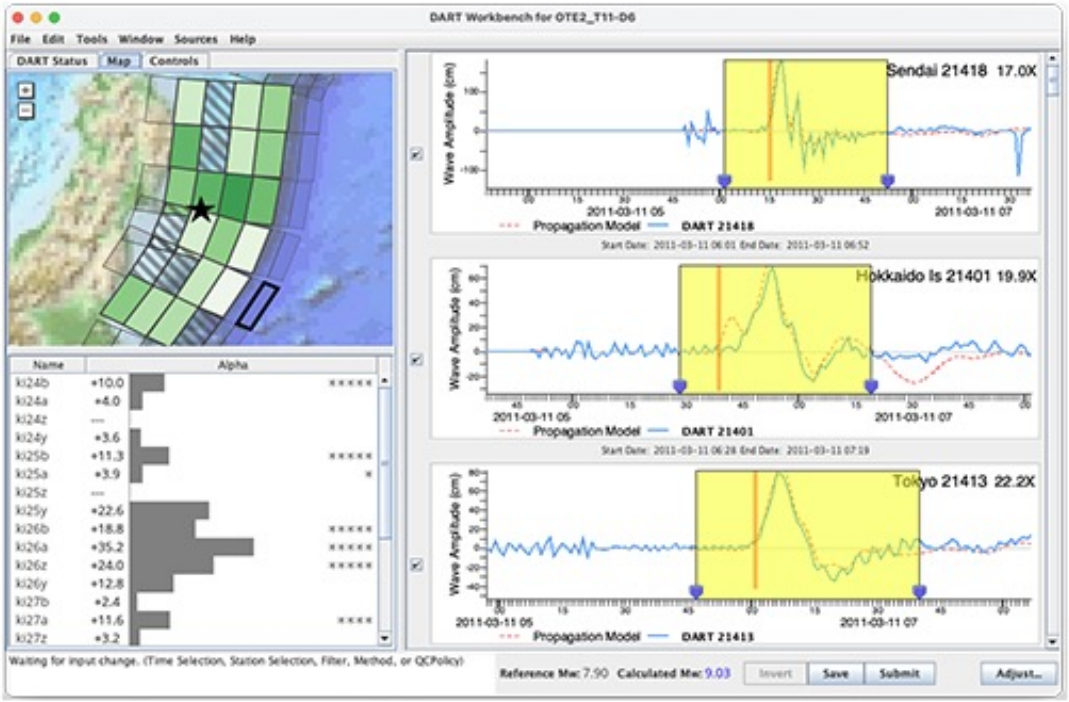


Tsunami Travel Times from Large Source



PMEL SIFT tsunami forecasting system: stands for Short-term Inundation Forecasting for Tsunamis. Uses the Propagation Database to compute a quick preliminary forecast of the ocean-wide propagation of the tsunami as a linear combination of unit sources selected to represent the initial earthquake parameters (epicenter and magnitude). This forecast provides interpretation for deep ocean tsunami observations. As more seismic information becomes available, adjustments may be made to the selection of unit sources to better represent the actual seismic event and repeating the linear combination to obtain an improved preliminary forecast. Once the actual tsunami wave reaches the DART®, inversion is performed to adjust the slip distribution of the selected unit sources or add unit sources as needed.





Limitations of Tsunami Forecasting

- **Historical Comparisons**
  - Historical record is very short and incomplete in most areas
  - No repeat events
  - May be okay to identify coastal sensitivities

PTWC Reporting of Tsunamis

- Expected Time of Arrival
- Maximum Wave Amplitude – above normal sea level and time of measurement

Thank You

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Pacific Tsunami Warning Center