

Tsunamis

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Tsunami seems like a strange word, but it actually comes from the Japanese words “tsu” meaning port and “nami” meaning wave. You have probably heard about the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in December 2004. But, do you know what tsunamis are and how they are caused?

Tsunamis appear as giant ocean waves. **Tidal waves** are another name for tsunamis. These waves come in series and may be 10 feet to over 100 feet tall. Although the waves are made of nothing more than water, they can be very destructive and deadly. Believe it or not, waves can travel at a speed of 500 miles per hour!

What causes these huge waves? Many things can cause tsunamis, but most often the cause is an underwater earthquake or volcanic eruption. Earthquakes can occur in the ocean floor just like they do on dry land. Volcanoes also erupt underwater. These events do not happen often, but, when they do, they **displace**, or move, enormous quantities of ocean water. This sudden movement can cause the tsunami waves to form.

Tsunamis are very powerful and can destroy whole cities in an instant. In the case of the recent tsunami in the Indian Ocean, more than 150,000 people were killed and hundreds of buildings and houses were destroyed leaving millions without homes and food. Although tsunamis are not common occurrences, it is important for us to understand what they are. They can happen in any ocean on Earth!