

Southern Chiles tremors traced to submarine fissure

Governor Vivianne Betancourt from the Aysen region, where hundreds of seisms have been recorded during the past weeks, said the epicenter has been located in the Aysen fiord, 20 kilometers to the northeast of Puerto Chacabuco, next to Mentirosa Island at a depth of ten kilometers.

Working on this data authorities and experts reached two hypotheses: first that the seismic activity will diminish until disappearing as usually happens with similar phenomena, although the situation could persist for months with intensity ranging between 5 and 6 degrees in the Mercalli scale.

The second hypothesis is a small liberation of energy accompanied by a leak of fluid magma helping to create a relatively small volcanic cone on the ocean bed in the Aysen fiord area. However, the submarine eruption could take years to materialize.

Governor Betancourt was emphatic in arguing that the current seism activity represents no danger for the residents of Puerto Aysen, Puerto Chacabuco and Cohaique. And if something does occur it will be superficial, low intensity and a fume column that could reach a couple of kilometers high.

The governor insisted that the activity is in no way related to movements of the tectonic plaques off shore the Aysen region and confirmed that the teams of scientists working in the area including the Navys Oceanographic Service, will continue to check the zone where the activity was located.

The phenomenon brought back memories of the 1991 disaster caused by the Hudson Volcano, which erupted for over five months, covering the area, (as far as Argentine Patagonia and the Falkland Islands), with ash and killing tens of thousands of farm animals. The eruption of Hudson was preceded by a similar spate of tremors and earthquakes.

Residents have been warned to take precautionary measures, such as disconnecting gas lines and unplugging electronic devices at night. They are also stocking up on emergency supplies like bottled water, canned goods, batteries and candles.

But in spite of residents fears, tourists are still arriving in droves to the Aysen Region, a popular destination in southern Chile.