

California coast less susceptible to tsunami than Japan

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

Much of California is less vulnerable to the kind of tsunami wreckage caused today in Japan because the state's coastline is generally steeper, a University of California quake expert said.

Steven Ward, a research geophysicist at UC Santa Cruz, said there are exceptions to that statement, including the Los Angeles coastal plain, many harbor areas, and any place where a major river enters the sea, such as the Moss Landing area at Monterey Bay.

But in general, he said California's steep bluff-encrusted shore would block the kind of broad waves that swept buildings and ships far inland in Sendai, the Japanese city of 1 million people near the epicenter of today's quake.

Ironically, he said it is the San Andreas earthquake fault that keeps California's coast so steep.

"Even big waves typically can't go very far inland because you have bluffs and whatnot," said Ward. "So the actual inundation zones are fairly limited. We're lucky that way."

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