

Beat: News

Volcano erupts in Papua New Guinea, prompting evacuations

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USPA News - Mount Tavurvur in Papua New Guinea erupted on early Friday, spewing rocks and ash high into the air and forcing the evacuation of nearby communities, authorities in the South Pacific nation said. Flights between Australia and Asia were also affected.

The eruption at Mount Tavurvur, located on the northeastern part of the island of New Britain, began at around 4:30 a.m. local time, according to the Darwin Volcanic Ash Advisory Center. It described the eruption as "explosive" with ash clouds reaching more than 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) high, followed by ongoing low level eruptions. The sudden eruption prompted authorities to evacuate communities close to the volcano, while residents in the town of Rabaul and other areas downwind have been advised to remain indoors to avoid the falling ash. Both Rabaul and Kerevat, along with other communities downwind, reported volcanic ash covering buildings and vehicles. PNG Ports Corporation Limited also closed the Port of Rabaul to all ships until future notice as a precaution. "The closure of the port is only temporary and we made this decision to protect our staff, other port users and the ships that use the wharf," CEO Stanley Alphonse was quoted as saying by the local Post-Courier newspaper. Friday's eruption prompted the Darwin Volcanic Ash Advisory Center to issue a code red for aviation, saying significant amounts of ash emissions were expected. Australian airline Qantas said the volcanic ash cloud had caused minor disruptions for its flights, but there was no significant impact. "Flight paths between Sydney and Narita and Sydney and Shanghai have been altered as a result of the volcanic ash cloud over Rabaul in eastern Papua New Guinea," a Qantas spokeswoman said. She said flights QF21, QF22 and QF130 would instead fly over central Papua New Guinea to avoid the cloud, causing a delay of approximately five minutes. Mount Tavurvur had been relatively quiet since early 2010, but low level eruptions were relatively common prior to 2010. Tavurvur and nearby Vulcan both erupted in 1994, destroying much of Rabaul and killing 5 people. The two volcanoes also erupted in 1937, killing at least 507 people.

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