

Ground Truth: Boston Tsunami

Origin of the Threat:

A rare but severe earthquake occurs in the Atlantic Ocean off of the east coast, sending a massive tsunami towards Boston and the Massachusetts coast. In terms of speed and size, this tsunami rivals that of the one that struck Japan in 2011. Moving at hundreds of miles an hour and reaching over one hundred feet in height, Boston is devastated. In this case, more damage was inflicted upon Boston and affected infrastructure and businesses, and the death toll reached into the tens-of-thousands as residents didn't have enough time to fully evacuate.

Specifics of the Threat:

Boston's population accounts for over 650,000 people. The first damage the tsunami causes will occur before it even reaches the shore. Mass hysteria caused by evacuation orders result in chaos, clogged roadways, and overloaded cell towers. Once the tsunami actually makes landfall, utter disaster follows. Thousands upon thousands of deaths occur almost immediately. Some buildings are completely destroyed; others are left structurally unsound. Billions of dollars worth of damage occur in the city of the sixth largest economy in the country — and twelfth in the world.

Two nuclear power plants lie off the coast of Boston. Much like in 2011, nuclear material seeping into the water poses a high and present threat for the immediate rescue operations and for the ecosystem at large. Although nuclear power plants are built to withstand the dangers tsunamis pose, plants that are in the process of being decommissioned are susceptible to damage

and contamination due to the transport of radioactive materials. Chemical plants native to Boston will also be affected, contaminating the soil and drinking water with dangerous toxins.

Data centers are taken offline, potentially losing massive amounts of data and disrupting the businesses that rely on them.

Boston University Laboratory — which hosts biological and viral agents for study and experimentation — further complicates the rescue and rebuild process by inducing fears that the tsunami might have inadvertently spread unknown diseases by damaging the facility.

Being considered a global pioneer in innovation and start-up — specifically regarding artificial intelligence — a disaster such as this one will hinder all kinds of academic, medical, and technological advancements that would otherwise benefit the entire globe.

Boston Logan International Airport is the most active airport in New England. All flights are grounded and — given its location — the airport receives catastrophic damage to its facilities. This means that all direct transportation to Boston becomes unfeasible for the foreseeable future. Rescue efforts are further complicated by this. Tourism, which accounts for a significant portion of Boston's economy, will be effectively killed.

As with any natural disaster, chaos undoubtedly leads to increased crime. Looting and lawlessness arise as a natural result of the tsunami.

