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# Puerto Rico Under Siege: Earthquakes Leave Power Plant With 'Destruction on Grand Scale'

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**Darkness in Puerto Rico following damage on power plants caused by recent earthquakes** By. RICARDO ARDUENGO/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

Just this morning at 4:05, a 4.8 earthquake affected Puerto Rico. It was one of seemingly countless shocks to the island commonwealth since Monday, which started with a magnitude 5.8 earthquake that resulted in some destruction. Then on Tuesday at 4:24 a.m., a 6.4 magnitude earthquake punished the island, leaving widespread destruction in its wake. Nine earthquakes — ranging from magnitude 4.5 to 5.6 — affected the island the same day following the magnitude 6.4. Images of the aftermath show homes either compromised or completely destroyed and left in piles of rubble. Other images show vehicles mangled under the weight of homes that came crumbling down from the sheer power of the natural disaster.

But perhaps the most damaging and costly consequence of the powerful 6.4 magnitude earthquake was the vast damage to the U.S. territory's power grid. [According to the Wall Street Journal](#), a power generation plant in Puerto Rico that provides roughly a quarter of the island's power has been substantially damaged by the earthquakes.

The Costa Sur Power Plant, the island's largest, experienced "destruction on a grand scale," said José Ortiz, executive director of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority at a Thursday news conference, according to WSJ. The plant is located in Guayanilla, a southern municipality close to the 6.4-magnitude earthquake.

As of midday Thursday, about 50 percent of Puerto Rico had electricity—up from about a third Wednesday, Mr. Ortiz said. He said power plants will continue to be brought back into service at a rate of about one a day through Sunday. If that schedule holds, power should be restored to the entire island by the end of weekend, Mr. Ortiz said, according to WSJ.

Yet even while work continues on the plant, the earthquakes have not ceased, with the latest being a magnitude 4.8 at 4:05 a.m. today. This could complicate power restoration, Mr. Ortiz cautioned, stating that the system will remain unstable for weeks until completion of an important job that predates the earthquakes: the electric utility needs to install a new transformer in one unit of the Aguirre power plant in Salinas, a job that should be completed in early February, he said, according to WSJ.

As of Tuesday, there were over 50 aftershocks that affected the island.

As Puerto Rico struggles to manage yet another disaster, it is still waiting on some \$18 billion in federal disaster funding already approved, but held up by the Trump administration. On Tuesday, the Federal Emergency Management Administration said that the president had signed an emergency declaration for Puerto Rico because of the earthquakes. On Thursday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) accused the Trump administration of acting unlawfully in withholding the money and called on officials to "cease and desist that illegal activity."

Along with the new disaster, PR has a debt load of \$70 billion and a relatively new interim government that was installed after the former governor was ousted amid an email scandal.

HUD officials and the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) have defended the administration's response to Puerto Rico.

"This administration has been working to support recovery efforts in Puerto Rico and will continue to do so. Over \$90 billion has been forecast to be spent on Puerto Rico recovery relief, which is unprecedented," said OMB spokesman Chase Jennings. "Under President Trump, Puerto Rico has received more recovery funds than at any time in U.S. history. While we continue to ensure Puerto Rico has what they need, we must also make sure the proper guidelines are in place to make certain the people of Puerto Rico directly benefit, not politicians with their history of corruption."

However, according to the Washington Post, the \$90 billion figure — which Trump has claimed has already been given to the island for hurricane response — actually reflects an estimate of Puerto Rico's needs over about the next two decades.

Congress appropriated \$19.9 billion through HUD's Community Development Block Grant disaster relief program for Puerto Rico's hurricane response needs. Of that amount, Puerto Rico to date has access to only \$1.5 billion, and Democrats are upset that HUD missed a Sept. 4 deadline to issue an official notice on the availability of \$8.3 billion more in remaining funds.

