Investigation of Submarine Landslides along the New England Margin with Implications to Tsunami Hazards

Principal Investigator (PI)
Christopher D.P. Baxter
Departments of Ocean/Civil and Environmental Engineering
Narragansett Bay Campus, University of Rhode Island
401-874-6575
baxter@egr.uri.edu

Co-PIs
Stephan Grilli, Department of Ocean Engineering, University of Rhode Island
Jason Chaytor, U.S. Geological Survey, Woods Hole Field Center
Uri S. ten Brink, U.S. Geological Survey, Woods Hole Field Center

Project Description

Tsunami hazard assessment is critical for coastal communities, emergency services, and industry for a regional risk assessment and response management of catastrophic events, such as those that occurred in 1998 in Papua New Guinea and 2004 in the Indian Ocean. Along the northeastern United States coastline, tsunami hazard assessment is in its infancy due to the lack of historical tsunami record and the uncertainty regarding the return periods of potential large-scale events, such as a large transoceanic tsunami caused by a collapse of the Cumbre Vieja volcano in the Canary Islands, or a large co-seismic tsunami initiated in the Puerto Rican subduction zone. Moreover, considerable geologic and some historical (e.g., the 1929 Grand Bank landslide tsunami) evidence suggests that the most significant tsunami hazard in this region may arise from submarine mass movements triggered on the continental slope by moderate seismic activity; such tsunamigenic landslides can potentially cause concentrated coastal damage affecting specific communities.

A probabilistic geotechnical and tsunami impact analysis that estimates Coastal hazard on the upper northeast coast of the United States was recently completed by PIs Baxter and Grilli (Grilli et al. 2009). This project was funded by FM Global, Inc., which is a large, Rhode Island based insurance company. The study involved a large number of slope stability analyses that investigated the role of earthquakes in the triggering of submarine landslides and the resulting tsunamis and runup caused by such failures. The resulting first-order estimate of the overall tsunami hazard in this region was found to be quite low at most locations as compared to the typical 100 year hurricane storm surge in the region (~5m). However, there were two locations along the coast of Long Island, NY and New Jersey that had an elevated tsunami hazard. The
locations along New Jersey (Figure 1) had the highest hazard, with an estimated peak inundation of approximately 4-m.

Figure 1. Transects along the New Jersey coastline in which submarine landslides pose an elevated tsunami hazard (up to 4-m of inundation for a 500-year tsunami event).

A parallel study of tsunami hazards along the U.S. east coast is being conducted by scientists from the United States Geological Survey on behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. A significant portion of this work has involved detailed characterization of the number, size and frequency of large submarine landslides in this region (Chaytor et al. 2009). This work has been conducted mostly using existing bathymetric and seismic data, although new multibeam mapping of the region will be conducted in the summer 2009 (see Figure 2).

What is missing from these complementary research projects at URI and USGS is high quality sediment samples for dating of existing failures and evaluation of the shear strength of the slopes for stability analyses. This information is critical to provide proper “ground truth” for the assumptions made in both the current stability of the slopes and the recurrence of large failures. **Therefore, we propose to conduct a 7-day cruise to obtain gravity cores at two locations off the coast of Rhode Island and New Jersey where we have identified submarine landslides with a possible link to seismically induced tsunamis.**
Education and Outreach

There will be significant participation in this cruise by both undergraduate and graduate ocean engineering students. This has been done successfully on at least two previous RIEP cruises (e.g. John King’s SAMP cruise in 2008 and Kate Moran’s PIES cruise in 2007). Feedback from the students on both cruises was extremely positive and highlights the importance of hands-on educational experiences in the training of future ocean engineers and scientists.

Relationship of Proposed Effort to Other Funded Research

As mentioned previously, the proposed cruise builds on two-years of funded research from a private insurance company (FM Global, Inc.) and an on-going study at the U.S. Geological Survey. Neither of these projects have funds available to obtain sediment samples from the study area, therefore the RI Endeavor program provides a unique opportunity to leverage the efforts of these two research groups.
Proposed Schedule and Shipboard Details

Ship time is requested for 7-days in September or October 2009. This includes approximately 36 hours for transit (12 hours to the first site, 12 hours to the second site, and 18 hours return trip). Gravity cores will be taken at locations on the continental slope and rise off the coast of Rhode Island (39° 45’ N, 70° 56’ W) and New Jersey (38° 53’ N, 72° 32’ W). Figure 3 shows proposed core locations for the Rhode Island site. Water depths at the proposed coring locations will range from 500 to 2500 m. The ocean engineering department’s Large-Diameter Gravity Corer will be used, which can obtain 10 cm diameter, 3 m long samples in soft sediments. This system was used successfully on the Endeavor in 2007 by Kate Moran in the same study area. This request is for a total of seven days of ship time at a day rate of $20,000 per day for a total request of $140,000.

Shipboard Participants
Chris Baxter (Chief Scientist), URI
Jason Chaytor (Co-Chief Scientist), USGS
Stephan Grilli, URI
Uri ten Brink, USGS
Oliver Taylor (Ph.D. student), and other ocean engineering students, URI
Curriculum Vitae for Christopher D. P. Baxter, Ph.D., P. E.

Associate Professor, Departments of Ocean/Civil and Environmental Engineering
University of Rhode Island Tel: 401-874-6575
Narragansett, RI 02882-1197 Fax: 401-874-6837
http://www.oce.uri.edu/faculty_pages/baxter/Baxter.htm

Education
B.S. Tufts University (Civil Engineering), 1990.
M.S. Purdue University (Civil Engineering), 1994.
Ph.D. Virginia Tech (Civil Engineering), 1999.

Experience

Associate Professor, Departments of Ocean/Civil and Environmental Engineering,
University of Rhode Island, 2000-present.
Research Fellow, Norwegian Geotechnical Institute/International Center for Geohazards,
Post-doctoral Fellow/Laboratory Manager, Marine Geomechanics Laboratory,
Department of Ocean Engineering, University of Rhode Island, 1999-2000.
Instructor, Department of Civil Engineering, Virginia Tech, 1998-1999.
Research Assistant, Department of Civil Engineering, Purdue University, 1992-1994.

Relevant Publications for the RIEP Proposal
Determining Submarine Landslide Tsunami Hazard along the Upper East Coast of the United
States, Marine Geology (accepted for publication).
microfluidics study of the triggering of underwater landslides by earthquakes. In Proc. 18th
Offshore and Polar Engng. Conf. (ISOPE08, Vancouver, Canada, July 2008), 8 pps.
the Initial Acceleration of Tsunamigenic Landslides, 3rd International Conference on
Submarine Mass Movements and Their Consequences, Santorini, Italy, 387-394.
the upper East Coast of the United States, 3rd International Conference on Submarine Mass
Movements and Their Consequences, Santorini, Italy, pp. 377-385.
Submarine Slope Failures in the Gulf of Mexico, Proceedings of the International Society of
Offshore and Polar Engineers Conference, June, Honolulu.
Jason D. Chaytor
US Geologic Survey Postdoctoral Scholar, Department of Geology & Geophysics, MS# 24, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Woods Hole, MA 02543.
Tel: (508) 457-2351, Email: jchaytor@whoi.edu and jchaytor@usgs.gov

Education:

2001-2006   Ph.D. Geological Oceanography, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR
1997-2000   B. App. Sci. (Honours-First Class) Geology, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

Employment and Professional Experience:

- Postdoctoral Scholar, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, 2006-present
- Research Assistant, College of Oceanic & Atmospheric Sciences, Oregon State University, 2001-2006
- Instructor, Geoscience Department, Oregon State University, 2006
- Geologist-Technical Assistant, Oil Company of Australia, Brisbane, Australia 1999-2001

Research Cruises:

2008    - *Chief Scientist*, R/V Seward Johnson, Gravity coring of landslides and seismites around Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Island
- R/V Oceanus, WHOI AUV ‘Sentry’ science payload test cruise
2007    - NOAA Ship Nancy Foster, High-resolution multibeam mapping of Mona Passage, offshore western Puerto Rico
2005    - F/V Velero IV, High-resolution multibeam mapping offshore southern California
- R/V Thomas G. Thompson, NOAA NWFSC Advanced Technologies Cruise II, multibeam mapping of shallow banks off the west coast of the United States
2004    - R/V Thomas Thompson/CSSF ROPOS, NOAA NWFSC Advanced Technologies Cruise, California Borderland
- *Co-chief scientist*, F/V Velero/Delta submersible, NURP Active Tectonics of the Peninsular Ranges-Transverse Ranges Intersection, California Borderland
- R/V Atlantis/DSRV ALVIN, NOAA OE Gulf of Alaska Seamounts Expedition
2003    - F/V Velero/Delta submersible, NURP Active Tectonics of the Peninsular Ranges-Transverse Ranges Intersection, California Borderland
2002    - R/V Roger Revelle, Paleoseismic Investigation of the Northern San Andreas Fault, Northern & Central California Margin
2001    - F/V Auriga, NOAA OE Lewis & Clark Legacy, Astoria Canyon Mapping

Selected Recent Publications:


