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## News Release

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# Local Scientist Joins Tsunami Study Team in Sri Lanka

Dr. Robert Morton, a research geologist at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Center for Coastal and Watershed Studies in St. Petersburg, Fla., is joining an international scientific team to capture technical data from the devastating tsunami of Dec. 26 in the Indian Basin, the USGS announced today. Morton, who left for Sri Lanka Jan. 7, will join colleague Dr. Bruce Jaffe, an oceanographer from the USGS Pacific Science Center in Santa Cruz, Calif. who left earlier in the week, to study the tsunami's effect on Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

“The USGS shares a common interest with scientists around the world to reduce the devastating effects of earthquakes and tsunamis on society,” said Dr. Lisa Robbins. “The goal of the USGS is to help improve the world's scientific knowledge of these events so measures can be taken to reduce the effects of future earthquakes and tsunamis. We are grateful for the invitation at this difficult time.”

Their team is headed by Philip Liu of Cornell University and Costas Synolakis of the University of Southern California. A second team will survey the eastern coast of India. Both teams will gather data on estimated wave heights, extent of inundation, geological scouring, flow direction, and other information related to the physical aspects of the tsunamis that may disappear quickly.

These teams of tsunami and earthquake engineering experts were assembled and dispatched by the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute. EERI will coordinate its efforts with teams from Japan and Australia that are working in the affected region. Morton will be abroad with the reconnaissance team from Jan. 7-16.

Currently Morton's research focuses on geological changes associated with tsunamis and hurricanes. During this project, Morton hopes to understand better how the tsunami affected shorelines so he can compare tsunami shoreline-change data to previously gathered hurricane storm-surge data.

For the past 30 years, Morton has worked nationally and internationally with federal and provincial agencies regarding natural hazards and the management of coastal resources, and has served on editorial boards of the *Journal of Sedimentary Research* and the *Journal of Coastal Research*. Morton's coastal research led to the participation in two projects sponsored by the International Union of Geological Sciences dealing with geologic indicators of rapid environmental change and the global effects of mining and urbanization on rivers and coastal systems.

Morton is also the principal investigator for the USGS National Assessment of Shoreline Change project. The project addresses the problem of beach erosion and shoreline change threatening coastal populations and community infrastructures in the U.S. For more information regarding the USGS National Assessment of Shoreline Change, visit: <http://coastal.er.usgs.gov/shoreline-change/>.

The USGS offers a unique combined scientific expertise in earth and biological science, including such specialties as oceanography, marine geology, and seismology. The St. Petersburg Center investigates scientific processes related to societal problems arising in coastal and marine environments, including natural hazards, resources, and environmental change.

The USGS serves the nation by providing reliable scientific information to describe and understand the Earth; minimize loss of life and property from natural disasters; manage water, biological, energy, and mineral resources; and enhance and protect our quality of life.

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