

# Earthquake Definitions

## Common Earthquake Terms

**Focus** The focus or hypocentre of an earthquake is where the earthquake originated from, usually underground on the fault zone.

**Epicentre** The epicentre of an earthquake is the point on the surface of Earth directly above the epicentre.

**Fault Plane** A fault is a weak point within a tectonic plate where pressure from beneath the surface can break through and causing shaking in an earthquake.

**Magnitude** Magnitude is used to describe the size of the Earthquake . There are a number of different ways to calculate the magnitude of an earthquake, including the Richter Scale. In Australia, seismologists prefer the use of the **moment magnitude scale**, which calculates the magnitude of an earthquake based on physical properties such as the area of movement (slip) along the fault plane.

**Modified Mercalli Scale** The Modified Mercalli scale is another way sometimes used to measure an earthquake. This scale is based on what people in the area felt and how much damage was done during the earthquake. This scale is in roman numerals.

**Seismology** Seismology is the study of earthquakes. People who study earthquakes are called Seismologists.

**Aftershock** Aftershocks are smaller earthquakes that may occur after the main earthquake in the same area. They are caused by the area readjusting to the fault movement, and some may be the result of continuing movement along the same fault zone.

**Foreshock** Foreshocks are smaller earthquakes occur in the same area as a larger earthquake that follows. Not all earthquakes have foreshocks or aftershocks. Sometimes a series of similar sized earthquakes, called an earthquake swarm, happens over months without being followed by a significantly larger earthquake.

**Waves** Earthquake waves travel through and on top of the surface of Earth causing the shaking and vibrations on the ground. Earthquake waves can travel hundreds of kilometres causing earthquakes to be felt a long way away from the origin.

