



The volcano's last big eruption, in 1980, blew more than 1,000 feet (305 m) off the top of the mountain.

## Mount St. Helens Cluster Quakes

Mount St. Helens, a volcano in Washington State, exploded in a violent eruption on May 18, 1980. The blast blew off the top and north side of the mountain, spewing huge amounts of ash over several western states. The eruption also caused catastrophic landslides and floods from melting snow and ice, resulting in more than fifty-six deaths. It was the worst volcanic eruption in the continental United States in recent history. So when scientists at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) began detecting a cluster of more than one hundred earthquakes in the area below Mount St. Helens in the spring of 2016, they investigated the matter very seriously.

The earthquakes were small, with most measuring just 0.5 or less on the Richter scale. Though the quakes were not very powerful, they were happening with alarming frequency. Sometimes there were forty or more quakes during a single week.

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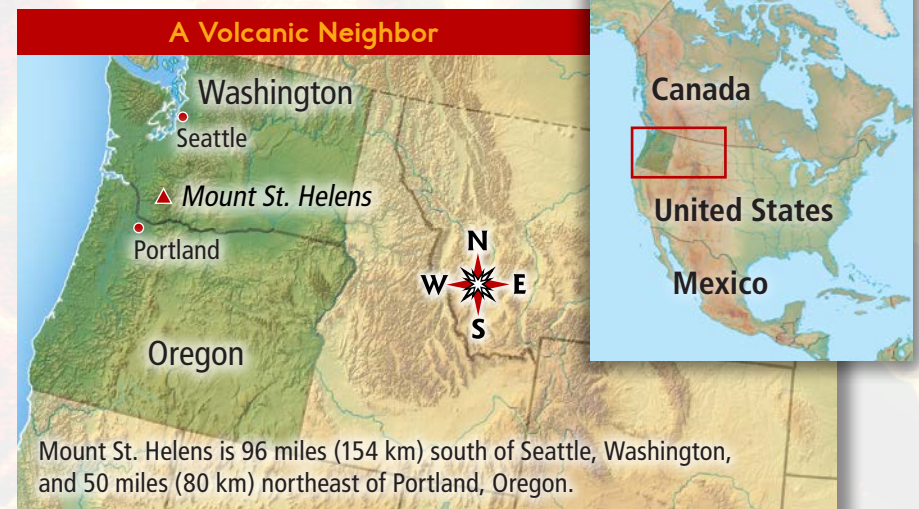
Experts say that hot liquid rock squeezing through cracks in layers of rock 1.2 to 4 miles (1.9–6.4 km) below the volcano caused the earthquakes.



Seismologists set up equipment to monitor earthquakes beneath Mount St. Helens.

Seismologists looked for evidence of unusual gases and other signs that magma, or hot liquid rock, might be building up again beneath Mount St. Helens. Such buildups are often a warning sign that a volcano is getting ready to erupt.

Thankfully, the scientists found no evidence that an eruption was about to happen. The clusters of tiny earthquakes were merely a sign that the volcano was slowly recharging itself as part of the normal cycle that some volcanoes go through. While Mount St. Helens will almost certainly erupt again in the future, it looks as though that day won't be anytime soon.



Mount St. Helens is 96 miles (154 km) south of Seattle, Washington, and 50 miles (80 km) northeast of Portland, Oregon.