

1989 a slow year for quakes

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1-29-90

SANTA CRUZ — Most Santa Cruzans will remember 1989 as the year they ducked beneath desks, scrambled from their beds and ran for their lives as one shaker after another rolled through town.

But geologists are likely to remember 1989 as a relatively slow year for earthquakes.

The world had fewer major earthquakes than expected last year, and fewer people than usual died because of them, according to a report issued by the U.S. Geological Survey.

"According to long-term records, we should have had 18 major quakes in the 7.0 to 7.9 (Richter scale) range, and one great quake measuring over 8.0," said Waverly Person, chief of the USGS Earthquake Information System in Golden, Colo.

"Instead we got five major and one great. It's not what we expected," he said.

The 55 significant quakes reported last year killed an estimated 526 people worldwide, compared to 28,000 that died in 1988.

An estimated 25,000 of 1988's quake-related

deaths took place in the Dec. 7 quake in Soviet Armenia, Person said. The Oct. 17 quake killed 62 people in Central California.

Person defined a "significant" quake as one registering a magnitude on 6.5 or greater, or one of lesser magnitude that causes deaths or significant damage.

In addition to the Oct. 17 quake, five significant quakes took place in the United States, or in nearby waters, in 1989. These quakes included:

- A Jan. 19, 5.2 tremor in West Los Angeles;
- a June 26, 6.2 temblor in Hawaii;
- an Aug. 8, 5.3 quake near Los Gatos;
- a Sept. 4, 6.9 event in Southern Alaska;
- and an Oct. 7, 6.7 shaker in the Aleutian Islands.

Only the Los Gatos quake resulted in a death, when a disoriented young man jumped from a second-story balcony.

Worldwide, the most deadly quake in 1989 was a magnitude 5.3-tremor that shook the Tajik region of the Soviet Union in January, triggering landslides that buried several villages and killed an

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estimated 274 people.

The second most fatal quake was a 5.7 temblor that shook Iran in August, triggering more landslides and killing a reported 90 people.

The biggest quake of the year, an 8.1 great quake that slammed the sparsely populated Macquarie Islands midway between Australia and Antarctica, resulted in no reported deaths or injuries.

Other 1989 earthquake infor-

mation from the USGS includes:

• The People's Republic of China had five significant earthquakes, causing 37 deaths and widespread damage.

• Japan experienced five significant tremors, all centered east and south of the island of Honshu. One person was reported killed.

• Australia, which normally has few damaging quakes, reported 11 deaths and major property damage when a magnitude 5.5 tremor hit

the southeastern city of Newcastle on Dec. 27.

• At least 30 people died when a magnitude 5.9 temblor hit Northern Algeria on April 15.

• Worldwide, four earthquakes registered magnitudes between 7.0 and 8.0. Two of these caused fatalities. The Oct. 17 Santa Cruz quake claimed 62 victims and a Dec. 15 event in the Philippines killed two.

"Probably several million earthquakes occur each year," Person

said. "But most are so small or occur in such remote areas that they are undetected by even the most sensitive instruments in the world."

Seismograph stations throughout the world normally locate 10,000 to 12,000 earthquakes each year, he said.

On average, about 10,000 earthquake-related deaths take place annually, according to the USGS.