

Loma Prieta Earthquake, October 17, 1989: Facts and Statistics

The Quake

The Loma Prieta Earthquake occurred on October 17, 1989 at 5:04 p.m. (Pacific Daylight Time) and lasted for about 15 seconds. The United States Geological Survey gave it a magnitude of 7.1. It was felt over an area of about 400,000 square miles. On April 18, 1990, there were several significant aftershocks in the Watsonville area; the largest had a magnitude of 5.4.

The rupture occurred on a 30-mile length of the San Andreas Fault called the Santa Cruz Mountains segment. The epicenter was eleven and a half miles underground at a spot near China Ridge in Nisene Marks State Park. The land on the seaward side of the fault slipped five and a half feet northwest.

The Human Cost

Six persons in Santa Cruz County died; it is estimated that 671 persons were injured.¹ (p.134)

Santa Cruz County was the hardest hit county and had the highest number of homes damaged or destroyed. It is estimated that "at least 85,000 persons were adversely affected by earthquake damage to their homes."¹(p.133) Many homes were so badly damaged that they were condemned. Many other damaged homes could be saved but were unsafe to live in until they were repaired. Individuals and families found themselves suddenly homeless, living in shelters, with friends or with family.

The Financial Cost

In 1990, the California Office of Emergency services estimated the damage in Santa Cruz County as \$433,000,000. The Office estimated that 13,329 private home were damaged and 774 destroyed with 1,615 businesses damaged and 310 destroyed.¹ (p.134)

The voters of the City of Santa Cruz passed Measure E, a sales tax to help fund earthquake recovery. The total sales tax received from April 1, 1991 to March 31, 1997 was \$20,324,000. The funds were spent on:

Downtown Reconstruction * (Streetscape and Infrastructure)	\$6,473,000
Cedar/Locust Parking Structure	6,279,000
Police Station *	5,672,000
Liability Claims	1,900,000
Total	\$20,324,000

* This is only the portion paid by Measure E. The total cost of these projects was much higher. Other City of Santa Cruz funds and disaster relief from FEMA and OES also contributed to these projects. [3](#)

Sources

The Loma Prieta (Santa Cruz Mountains), California, Earthquake of 17 October 1989. California Division of Mines and Geology, 1990. (Special Publication 104).

"Loma Prieta Earthquake," *California Geology*, November 1990.

"City of Santa Cruz Measure E Sales Tax for Earthquake Recovery." City of Santa Cruz, California, September 1999. [Unpublished fact sheet].

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