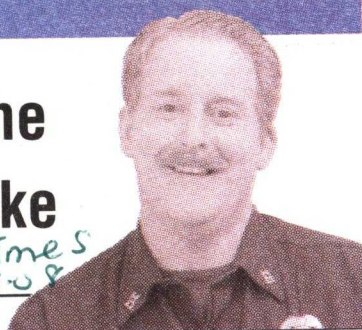


# 19th Anniversary of the Loma Prieta Earthquake

*Earthquakes - Ten yrs & Aptos Times 10-15-08*

By Mike Conrad, Captain Aptos/La Selva Fire Dept.



It's hard to believe that 19 years ago on October 17 1989 at 5:04 pm I was sitting here at the fire station talking with my wife and our two year old daughter, who had just stopped by on their way home from shopping when the 7.1 Loma Prieta Earthquake struck. All of these years later, Loma Prieta Earthquake is often used as a reference in time: i.e. "we built that before the earthquake" or "we moved here two years after the earthquake". An event that powerful both physically and emotionally does leave an ever-lasting impression on those who experienced it.

With the 19th anniversary of the Loma Prieta Earthquake, I wanted to bring up some important information that can help us all. Disaster memory loss is a condition that affects almost all of us. While local historian Sandy Lydon first brought this term to my attention, I had been well aware of the symptoms for a long time. Each year the farther away we get from a disaster the more we forget, the less prepared we become for the next time.

Many people living here now were either born after Loma Prieta or have moved into the area and have no idea what it was like. It is up to those of us who were here to remind and educate these people what Loma Prieta Earthquake was like and the importance of being prepared. Disaster Memory Loss is a double edge sword, not only do we tend to forget as time goes on but at the same time we are getting closer to the next big

event. So at a time when we should be increasing our preparedness we are often, in fact becoming less prepared than we were.

Preparedness is the key to success, any success whether its school, work, entertainment or play if we were well prepared before we start we will most often be successful in whatever we were doing. One of the comments I hear often from students who have taken our Community Emergency Response Team training is that they now feel not only educated but empowered, they no longer fear disaster. They better understand, and respect the effects of a disaster but do not fear the unknown.

I spent some time on-line reviewing information on Loma Prieta Earthquake when I came across some 911 recordings for Santa Cruz County during the first half hour following the quake. I will include portions of these transcripts here but the real impact is to hear the nervousness and fear in the voices of not only the callers but dispatchers and responders alike.

**Dispatcher:** Emergency Center, what are you reporting.

**Caller:** Earthquake!

At first, this may sound humorous; everyone in the San Francisco and Monterey Bay area knows there was an earthquake. Why did this caller call 911 to report the earthquake? They had no idea what else to do, and this is not an isolated

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call there are many that called to report nothing more than they felt the earthquake.

**Dispatcher:** Emergency Center.

**Caller:** Hi

**Dispatcher:** Yes.

**Caller:** Just calling to say we have a lot of damage, but...

**Dispatcher:** Do you need does anybody need medical attention?

**Caller:** Not that I'm aware of at the moment.

Again, you might wonder why someone called 911 if nothing was wrong. If you do not know what to do many people will be looking for answers or direction.

**Dispatcher:** Emergency Center.

**Caller:** Ah...

**Dispatcher:** Emergency Center!

**Caller:** Yea, I'm...

**Dispatcher:** I know there's been an earthquake. Do you need help?

**Caller:** No

All of these examples of actual calls to 911 during the early moments following the Loma Prieta earthquake are the result of people under stress and not prepared.

Many things have changed and improved regarding earthquakes in building and construction standards from the great San Francisco Earthquake in 1906 till the Loma Prieta Earthquake in 1989. However often the more things change, the

more things stay the same.

This first picture shows citizens setting up camp after the 1906 earthquake, the second picture shows citizen setting up camp after Loma Prieta while clothing styles and equipment has changed over the years the basic principle has not, people will be on their own for sometime following a major disaster and they must be ready and prepared to do so before the event occurs. To steal a line from MasterCard, disaster supplies, \$200.00 being prepared for the next disaster "Priceless."

I know you have heard it all from me before, BUT I must repeat it again. Now is the time to start becoming prepared, I don't expect people to be able to do it all at once, look at it as a journey to preparedness and while each single step does not get us very far all of the steps together will get you to your destination.

Start picking up an item or two each time your at the store. Go through, look for hazards in your home one room a month, and correct as much as you can. Take a disaster preparedness class, first-aid training or join or start a CERT team in your neighborhood. Taking these steps will get you to that special place I call Preparedness. ■

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For more information or help in taking these steps please contact your local fire department, the American Red Cross or feel free to email me at [mikec@aptofire.com](mailto:mikec@aptofire.com) and I will point you in the right direction.



A woman looks at her belongings on her lawn after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.