

RR - Earth quakes Earthquake Question Here Isn't If, But When, 'Big One' Occurs

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The question is not what to do IF a major earthquake hits along the San Andreas Fault.

The question is what to do WHEN it hits, says Scotts Valley Geologist Ted Snyder.

"It's going to hit sooner or later. A big one is overdue," he says.

The former U.S. Geologic Survey geologist will teach a course starting Thursday at Cabrillo College to help area residents prepare for that "big one."

Right now, he says, most Northern Californians are "woefully unprepared" to deal with such a disaster.

"The purpose of my class will be to train people about what to do to protect themselves and their property," he explains.

When the "big one" comes, Snyder feels survival will be up to the individual.

The director of disaster planning in Menlo Park, he explains, has estimated that community would have to endure six hours before receiving outside help.

It could take two or three times as long to get help into Santa Cruz County because of geographics, he said.

"During those hours of waiting on your own, you must provide your own life support. If you're bleeding you'd better know how to stop that bleeding. If you're in shock, you have to know what to do. If your house catches fire you must know how to put it out..." Snyder says.

"When people can get in, you'll get help. But if you couldn't control your bleeding, that help will be too late."

Damage from earthquakes is twofold, he says. First is the direct damage.

"Direct damage of the quake, itself, could be catastrophic in this area. Houses will be destroyed, freeway overpasses will come down."

Next will come indirect damage: Landslides, dam failures and possibly a tsunami (tidal wave).



Ted Snyder

"In the quake in Peru a number of years ago, the direct damage was bad enough because thousands of homes collapsed around the people. Then there was an avalanche that wiped out whole villages," Snyder explained.

"In getting ready for the direct damage from a quake, we have to make our homes secure," Snyder teaches.

Residents should be aware of high shelving with heavy objects on those high shelves. Furnishings such as large, unsecured china cabinets, he says, can not only be expensive casualties, but also lethal weapons during an earthquake.

"Many things we take for granted, such as big glass windows, are potential problems."

Advance planning for earthquakes is a must for every family, he insists.

"Each family has to look at the totality of its life and plan that the quake will happen in the worst possible situation. Families need to make plans to put their life back together from this worst case," he explains.

One such example, he points out, is a family with the father at work in San Jose, the mother at a bridge party in Aptos and the children attending different schools when the quake hits.

"You have to plan how to get the children home, who will take care of the children until the mother gets home and what to do until the father gets home," Snyder explains.

"Families also must make plans for the earthquake happening at night. Many people don't think about the likelihood of this happening at night — maybe even on a rainy night. In that case you'd be cold, hungry and afraid. Those are a lot of strikes against you before you add such things as injury."

"My wife and I each keep climbing boots in the car. We have blankets, a first aid kit, tools and water in the car. If we can't get back in our house, maybe we can get in our car. That's a starting point. If you can get warm and dry in this worst possible situation you'll feel a little more secure."

Along with a disaster plan, family members must take a look at their home and office for hazards, such as high bookcases. Filing cabinets and china cabinets should be anchored. Flex tubing should be used with all appliances and on the water

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heater, which also should be secured, Snyder instructs.

"You should know where valves and switches are and have tools for rescues. You need a fire extinguisher and the knowledge to use it."

"And, you need food, water, a radio, first aid kit, blankets and a flashlight," he explains.

"You must look at every situation where you live and work. Where are the hideouts? Where am I safest? If a quake came now, where would I go?" Those are some of the questions Snyder says must be asked.

"I'm not paranoid, but I always like to know how to get out of a place, whether it's an airplane, a home, or a building," he said.

The problem with earthquakes, he says, is that they come without warning. "You've got no time to get to a far corner."

But, people can minimize their chance of injury by moving away from windows or a kitchen cupboard full of dishware.

Most homes, he explains, are built with extra framing in doorways and those areas are safer than in an open area of a structure, which is more subject to shaking and stress.

Again, Snyder stresses that everyone needs first aid training, available in monthly training sessions by the American Red Cross.

Snyder, a qualified first aid instructor, will devote time to treatment of injuries during the eightweek class, which will be conducted from 7 to

9 p.m. on Thursdays. The course will conclude with instruction in cardio-pulmonary resuscitation.

Some elements of survival cannot be prepared for, however.

"Timing of an earthquake is important for survival," he concedes, explaining that if the "big one" hits on a summer Sunday afternoon, "it would tax all emergency services."

Finally, he says, the size of the "big one" is a determining factor to survival. "If the ultimate earthquake comes, we're in trouble. There's no way in God's world we can be ready for it."

Persons interested in learning more about preparing for earthquakes by attending Snyder's upcoming class should contact Cabrillo College