

# Where not to be in an earthquake

4-18-86

San Francisco recalls 1906  
earthquake — **Page A14**

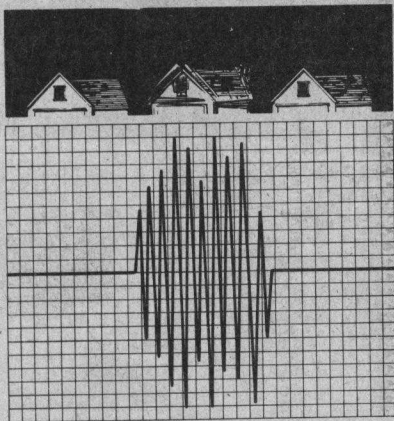
By **JOAN RAYMOND**

**Sentinel Staff Writer**

**SANTA CRUZ** — The city's chief building official has lived in earthquake country for 50 years and plans to stay despite the horrifying prospect of a geologic cataclysm that would destroy people, pets and property in one giant, terrifying swallow of the California landscape.

Although he has studied quakes and their terrible aftereffects at annual professional conferences in Coalinga — the site of a big 1983 quake — David Steeves is not an alarmist.

California may have its quakes, but there is always something "unattractive" about an area, says Steeves.



If it's not quakes, it's hurricanes, tornadoes, tidal waves or volcanoes.

So Steeves plans to stay in Santa Cruz where he has lived since 1935, despite the fact he knows Santa Cruz is very similar to Coalinga in terms

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of the age and composition of its buildings.

But there are some places he definitely would rather not be in the case of "the Big One" — the Loudon Nelson Community Center, downtown, the old Front Street County Jail or the County Center on Ocean Street.

About 60 percent of Santa Cruz homes were built before 1947 when stringent seismic codes were introduced, according to Building Department estimates.

But Steeves isn't going to let the prospect of a quake run him out of town, even though he lives in a 110-year-old Victorian — one of the houses that sways like a wet noodle during a quake and can be "the worst" when it comes to earthquake safety, says Steeves.

But Steeves says he would not mind being at home in his vintage Victorian during a quake — considering the options — because he has followed his own advice to the public and remodeled his home for seismic safety.

Knowing the safety problems of Santa Cruz structures, Steeves had promoted passage of the city's new seismic-safety ordinance that requires homeowners to spend 1 percent of the cost of remodeling projects on seismic-safety features. The new law took effect in January and so far has been well-received by homeowners and builders, said Steeves.

The seismic-safety ordinance "is really the only thing the city has done" to encourage quake safety, says Steeves. He hopes City Council members will expand the ordinance to include commercial structures.

Steeves knows "nothing is really earthquake-proof," but, obviously, there are some places safer than others in the case of a quake.

In the case of a quake, he would not want to be at the Loudon Nelson Community Center, the site of the former Laurel Elementary School that was shut down years ago for combined reasons of declining enrollment and the fact the school building did not meet requirements of the state Field Act. The Field Act is the seismic-safety law governing schools in which attendance is mandatory.

"It's not a safe building today," says Steeves, even though he acknowledges some renovation has been done.

Steeves considers it a "political joke" that the building that was considered not safe enough for mandatory classes, is now being run by the city and county as a community center for day care, recreation, senior citizen and other social service programs.

## When an earthquake strikes A checklist

- ☐ 1. Remain calm - reassure other.
- ☐ 2. If inside, stay there! — If outside, stay there! Take cover. Protect head and face. Don't run down stairs.
- ☐ 3. Do not light a match or turn on a light switch. Use a flashlight!
- ☐ 4. Wear sturdy shoes.
- ☐ 5. Check for injuries — administer first aid.
- ☐ 6. Check for fires.
- ☐ 7. Check utilities — shut off if necessary.
- ☐ 8. Draw a moderate amount of cold water.
- ☐ 9. Turn on battery operated radio (or car radio) for emergency bulletins.
- ☐ 10. Clean up hazardous materials.
- ☐ 11. Take routine medication.
- ☐ 12. Do not go without food or water too long; however avoid open containers near shattered glass.
- ☐ 13. Confine frightened pets.
- ☐ 14. Check house for structural damage — evacuate if necessary.
- ☐ 15. Do not use telephone except in extreme emergency.
- ☐ 16. Be prepared for additional earthquakes shocks.
- ☐ 17. Stay out of danger areas — never go to the beach to watch for a Tsunami (giant sea waves).
- ☐ 18. Respond to requests from civil defense officers, police, firefighting or relief organizations.

Source: CHES of California

## Hazardous conditions in older homes

These conditions, found in many older homes, are considered potentially hazardous in the case of an earthquake:

- Structure sitting on mud sills.
- Un-reinforced masonry, rubble or concrete foundation.
- No anchor bolts securing structure to foundation.
- No lateral bracing in cripple wall.
- No bracing of roof system.
- Unreinforced masonry chimney.
- Porches, patio covers, awnings and additions not properly secured to main structure.
- Unsecured hot water heater and furnace.
- No restraints on tall, interior furnishings.
- Lack of knowledge about location and operation of utility switches and valves and an emergency plan.

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A packet of information on earthquake preparedness is available from the City Inspections Department, 809 Center Street, 95060. The price is \$1, if picked up at the department, or \$2 by mail. It is free to city homeowners who apply for remodeling permits.

The city's seismic-safety ordinance requires homeowners to spend one percent of the costs of a remodeling project on quake-safety features.

For more information, call the Inspections Department, 429-3555.

Responded Councilman John Laird, "The council is satisfied it is a safe building. If Mr. Steeves feels people aren't safe, then I'm sure the council would have heard from him."

Other places on Steeves' avoidance list during an earthquake include the public library. The problem is not the building itself, said Steeves, but all those books that might come down.

He would rather be in his old house — now that it has been remodeled with safety features — than downtown, with all the old, un-reinforced or brick buildings.

But — if he is downtown — Steeves would rather be inside than in the middle of the street, with the debris falling all around or on top of him.

"It would probably be better if the quake happened at night and not during the day, because then there would not be so many people downtown," he said.

He doesn't want to be in the old County Jail on Front Street at all, but particularly not during a violent temblor. "There is very limited exiting," he noted.

The five-story, concrete County Center on Ocean Street is "theoretically" safe, "but I wouldn't want to be in it," Steeves said.

In the category of "reasonably safe," Steeves includes the Municipal Wharf ("very flexible"), newer buildings at City Hall, the Dream Inn, Boardwalk ("there has been constant maintenance"), Civic Auditorium and Palomar Hotel ("reinforced concrete, a good building").

Obviously, a fire station would be a good place to be, he added.

He says the Cooperhouse — the heritage, three-story former courthouse on the Pacific Garden Mall — is safer than it looks and is "one of the better masonry-built buildings in town, put together with cement mortar."

Also, the old Hall of Records — now the Octagon Museum located next to the Cooperhouse — is reasonably safe because it has been sprayed with gunite, a construction compound; he says.

Generally, the newer the building and the simpler the design, the safer, says the building inspector.

It was not until the 1935 — after a quake jolted the city of Long Beach — that the Field Act was instituted and seismic-safety requirements were added to the state Uniform Building Code, the building official's bible.

The code is updated every three years. Seismic safety was emphasized in more recent years, starting in the '60s.

After the city's seismic-safety remodeling ordinance was passed, "we asked ourselves why we hadn't done it a long time ago," said Steeves.

He said property owners who have had to follow the ordinance are usually "very thankful" and some actually do much more retrofitting work than is required.

"Before this, they didn't know where the dangers were in their houses," remarked Steeves.

He emphasizes the need for evacuation plans and drills and urges residents to keep at least three-days worth of emergency supplies on hand in a case of a quake, flood, slide or other catastrophe.

Steeves stresses the obvious: "If you're isolated during a quake, remember, no one will be able to help you. You have to prepare yourself."