

Expert says spate of earthquakes not unusual

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SANTA CRUZ — Continuing aftershocks from the Loma Prieta earthquake combined with a spate of quakes from around the globe have many Santa Cruzans as sensitized to temblors as a seismograph.

But we can all relax just a bit, if we believe the experts: Neither the aftershocks nor the recent worldwide quakes are anything unusual, said geophysicist John Minsch, of the U.S. Geological Survey's National Earthquake Information Center, in Golden, Colo.

Minsch's assessment came after a magnitude 4.0 aftershock rolled

through Santa Cruz County at 5:37 a.m. Sunday. A slightly smaller aftershock — magnitude 3.9 — struck at 5:31 p.m. Saturday.

There were no reports of additional damage or injuries from the recent aftershocks.

Aftershocks from the Oct. 17 quake are "still going on pretty much as we expected," Minsch

commented. Quakes the size of the recent pair will continue "maybe for several months, but they should be decreasing."

In the wake of the recent quake here, news of other quakes around Northern California and the world have drawn notice:

- A magnitude 3.6 quake shook much of the San Francisco Bay

Area at 11:16 p.m. Friday. It was centered four miles north of San Leandro, apparently on the Hayward fault, the USGS said.

- Twelve hours earlier, at 11:09 a.m. Friday, a magnitude 4.3 quake hit 70 miles south of Reno, Nev. The quake jolted the Lake Tahoe area

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and was accompanied, three minutes later, by a magnitude 3.2 aftershock.

Recent quakes have rocked Japan, the Admiralty Islands, the Norwegian Sea and Algiers, the USGS said. But the upswing in reported quakes may reflect heightened interest more than increased earthquake activity, the agency's Minsch observed.

"We get periods of increased seismicity as well as rather quiet times," he said. "I don't think this is anything unusual."

The largest of the recent quakes was the 7.1-7.3 magnitude quake that struck 320 miles north of Tokyo Thursday morning. The quake came after several "other events in recent weeks" in the same area, 90 miles off the coast of Honshu, the USGS said. Some 6,000

residents of coastal villages were evacuated because of concern that the quake might cause tidal waves, or tsunamis, the Associated Press said.

"They had a local tsunami on the coast of Honshu, just a few feet," Minsch said. "But nothing that crossed the Pacific. You'd have to have a 7.5 or more (magnitude quake) to do that."

Minsch also downplayed the significance of Friday's temblor on the

Hayward fault, which scientists say has a 30 percent chance of losing a magnitude 7 quake during the next three decades.

"They have earthquakes on the Hayward fault probably more often than on the San Andreas, so I don't think it's anything out of the ordinary," he said. Such scattered temblors do not mean a bigger quake will soon follow.

A magnitude 5.8 quake hit in the Admiralty Islands, northeast of

New Guinea, at 9:39 a.m. PST Friday, the USGS said. There were no reports of damage.

Two quakes, magnitudes 5.6 and 5.4, were detected in the Norwegian Sea Saturday, at 10:04 a.m. and 10:17 a.m. PST respectively.

A pair of moderate quakes, measured 4 and 3.5, hit Algeria on Sunday, a week after a magnitude 6 quake claimed 26 lives and injured 450 in towns and cities on the Mediterranean coast near Algiers.