

'Moderate' Los Angeles Quake Highlights Need for Preparation

By Ryan Flinn and Samantha Zee

July 30 (Bloomberg) -- The earthquake that struck the Los Angeles area yesterday underscores the importance of preparation to prevent damage, death and injuries in the event of a bigger temblor, officials said.

"We are as prepared as anyone can be," California Governor **Arnold Schwarzenegger** told reporters yesterday. "After Katrina, what has happened there, made us really re-evaluate our preparations," he said, referring to the 2005 hurricane that was the most economically destructive in U.S. history.

The 5.4-magnitude earthquake struck the Los Angeles area yesterday at 11:42 a.m. local time, 28 miles (46 kilometers) east-southeast of the Los Angeles Civic Center, the U.S. Geological Survey said on its **Web site**. The quake was 8.5 miles deep and was felt more than 100 miles away. The preliminary assessment by city firefighters yielded no immediate evidence of death, serious injury or damage to infrastructure.

"It occurred at 8 miles, which is relatively deep for an earthquake," said Thomas Jordan, a seismologist at the University of Southern California, and director of the Southern California Earthquake Center, in an interview. "Not having much damage, or buildings come down, also depends on luck. To some extent an earthquake may be a trigger, but a badly designed building will still likely come down."

Regular Shifting

The U.S. West Coast is situated in a region where the Pacific and North American plates meet. These tectonic plates shift regularly, causing earthquakes that sometimes produce tsunamis. Quakes of magnitude 5 and more can cause considerable damage, depending on their depth.

A USGS study issued in April found that California will almost certainly be hit within 30 years by an earthquake as strong as the 6.7-magnitude temblor that struck the Northridge area of Los Angeles in 1994, killing 60 people, leaving 20,000 homeless and damaging 40,000 buildings.

Earlier this month, San Francisco Mayor **Gavin Newsom** announced new legislation to shore up so-called soft-story, wood frame buildings -- structures with garages or stores on the street level -- with retrofitting.

Fighting Chance

"Although there is no such thing as an earthquake-proof building, engineers agree that proper seismic retrofitting can give buildings a fighting chance against a sizeable earthquake," Newsom said in a July 7 **statement**. "We must take the same measures to insure the safety of our homes and workplaces as we do our families and selves."

Spending for emergency preparedness has risen steadily in Los Angeles, with the city's Emergency Management Department budgeting 16 percent more in

the **2007-2008 fiscal year** than during 2006-2007, when spending climbed about 9 percent from the previous year, according to the budgets on the city's Web site.

In the last year ``we appointed a new general manager of the emergency management department, a career fire fighter, with 20 years experience, and he leads some of the best trained people in the city," Jonathan Powell, a spokesman for Los Angeles Mayor **Antonio Villaraigosa**, said.

The Los Angeles Fire Department **called** yesterday's earthquake ``light to moderate." The earthquake's epicenter was 3 miles southwest of Chino Hills, California.

‘Very Lucky’

``We were very lucky with this one," Schwarzenegger said at a **press conference**. ``I don't think it was severe. But obviously people felt scared."

Chino Hills **Ace Hardware** store manager Tom Balaja was in the back office with a co-worker when the earthquake struck.

``He had never been in an earthquake, his look was one of sheer terror," said Balaja, 47, in an interview. When the shaking started, Balaja began grabbing customers and pushing them out the front door. ``You don't want to create a scene of terror but you want them out of the store."

Mary Hannum, 59, a resident of Chino Hills for more than two decades, was driving her car when the earthquake hit.

``The whole arm of the stoplight was swaying like it was a hurricane," she said. ``I knew it was a quake. It felt like you were driving on flat tires."

Nixon Library

The Richard M. Nixon **Library** & Birthplace Foundation, based in Yorba Linda, California, is about 6 miles (10 kilometers) north of where the earthquake struck.

``My office shook, and I knew exactly what was going on," said Sandy Quinn, assistant director of the library. ``I've been through a lot of these, and it's always a thrill."

Quinn walked through the library's galleries and the East Room, a replica of the White House East Room, and checked with security officials to ensure there were no injuries.

``We evacuated the guests, and did a walk through the facility, there was no major damage, but some minor," he said. ``Some of the heavy crystal chandeliers must have swayed as several of the pieces had fallen to the floor."

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