

# New earthquake study underscores need to prepare

Steven Mayer, Bakersfield Californian, 8-20-10

New research suggesting that a major earthquake near Kern County is more than a century overdue won't immediately affect disaster plans here.

Emergency planners are already operating on the assumption the Big One could strike at any time.

The research, published Friday in the journal *Geology*, examined evidence of past temblors along the San Andreas fault where it cuts across the Carrizo Plain about 60 miles southwest of Bakersfield.

The UC Irvine research team determined that a large quake on that section of the fault is probably between nine and 108 years overdue.

"I don't read the journal *Geology*," said Georgianna Armstrong, who manages the Kern County Office of Emergency Services.

Maybe not, but Armstrong lives and breathes disaster preparedness and she's been preaching it for years, sometimes to deaf ears.

"People don't want to hear it," she says. "We saw people die after Hurricane Katrina for lack of drinking water. But did we learn the lesson?"

Have you stockpiled water at home? she asks pointedly. What about flashlights? Non-perishable food? Heavy boots and gloves? Propane for cooking when utilities are down?

"Have you anchored bookcases and mirrors overhanging your bed?" she asks. "There are things you can do for free."

For the past two years, Armstrong has participated in the Great California ShakeOut, an annual statewide safety drill to promote earthquake preparedness and public safety. The event simulates what is thought to be one of the most likely scenarios, a massive quake on the San Andreas -- but centered much farther south in the Coachella Valley.

That actually makes a lot of sense, says Sinan Akciz, one of the UC Irvine researchers and lead author of the study.

A large quake in that region is thought to be hundreds of years overdue, he said. Probably longer overdue than the expected Carrizo quake.

If a powerful shaker does erupt on the Carrizo Plain, it could certainly impact Bakersfield and other parts of Kern County, Akciz notes. The Temblor Mountain range between the plain and the San Joaquin Valley could serve as something of a buffer, but Akciz didn't want to speculate on its significance.

"This shows us how little we know," he says of the study, which he hopes to expand upon in years to come. "The biggest message from this is to continue with preparedness efforts."

Kern County is no stranger to earthquakes. It was the epicenter of a massive 7.5 magnitude quake that struck on July 21, 1952. The temblor and its aftershocks killed 12 people and damaged or destroyed scores of buildings in Bakersfield and Tehachapi.

But it wasn't centered on the notorious San Andreas fault. The 1952 shaker originated on the lesser known White Wolf fault.