

Quake likely related to Mexicali tremor, scientist says

Riverside Press-Enterprise, 7-8-10

Wednesday's magnitude-5.4 earthquake was not an aftershock of the 7.2 tremor that hit southwest of Mexicali on Easter Sunday -- but it most likely was related, a Caltech scientist said.

The quake caused at least one rock slide and left several people trapped in elevators, but no injuries or significant damage to buildings or roads were reported in the Inland region or other areas of Southern California.

The quake struck at 4:53 p.m. and was centered 15 miles north-northwest of Borrego Springs in northeast San Diego County, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Shaking was reported as far as Burbank and Santa Monica, nearly 120 miles away.

Very close to the epicenter, Donna Hart was reading at the dining room table in her home at the Anza RV Resort when the earthquake hit.

"My whole house twisted," Hart said. "I thought 'Oh my God! Is this it?'"

Scores of aftershocks followed, including at least three that measured 3.0 or higher.

Anthony Guarino, a seismic analyst at Caltech, said "the stress and strain" on the San Jacinto and Elsinore faults changed in the wake of April's large Baja quake.

The Coyote Creek Fault, where Wednesday's quake was thought to be centered, he said, "is kind of an extension of those areas."

But the Borrego Springs quake was not an aftershock.

"It is a separate event," Guarino said. "But to say that it would have happened without the main shock -- it would be difficult to say that."

SOME DAMAGE

The Palm Springs Police Department reported a rock slide near the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway caused by the quake, but officers who responded found that no one was injured and no damage was done to the tram or its facilities.

The tramway's public affairs manager, Lena Zimmerschied, said the slide was on the other side of a ridge. The tramway was operating normally after maintenance workers made safety checks and determined it had escaped unscathed.

A rock slide on Highway 74 damaged several cars traveling through the Pinyon Pines area in the mountains south of Palm Springs, but it could not be confirmed whether the slide was a result of the quake.

At Agua Caliente Casino Resort near Rancho Mirage, several people were stuck in elevators for 30 to 40 minutes, said Therese Everett-Kerley, director of communications.

Everett-Kerley said the elevators were designed to stop automatically in the event of an earthquake. Fewer than 10 people were trapped in two lifts, she said.

Otherwise, the damage appeared to be limited to breakable items that fell off shelves -- and to people's nerves.

At the Bottle Shoppe Liquor Store in Borrego Springs, several bottles were knocked off shelves and smashed, employee Pam Sherrill said by phone.

"I was behind the counter and it felt like forever for me to get outside," she said. "I'm still scared. I don't like these things."

But by 6 p.m. the store was cleaned up and open for business again, Sherrill said.

Fairway Foods market in Idyllwild "had a couple of things come off the shelf, but nothing got broken," reported Juan Patlan, market assistant manager.

He was standing in the market aisle and thought to himself, "Please don't let the wine fall" and while bottles tipped over on shelves, none broke.

In Riverside, only one grocery store that was contacted reported any significant damage. Holy Flores, the service operations manager at the Albertsons market in the 5200 block of Arlington Avenue, reported "we had three aisles with liquid all the way down them."

Flores said the liquid was a mix of ice cream toppings, cherries and cooking oil.

"It was a gooey mess," she said.

'IT FELT LIKE A TRAIN'

Borrego Springs resident Bill Haneline said he heard the earthquake before he felt it.

First there was a large pop, like something hit his home, he said. Then came several hard jolts.

"It felt like a train was on tracks running right by the house," Haneline said.

Haneline said he grabbed his dog and ran out of the house.

"We moved fast," he said.

Haneline said the area has been hit by a few smaller earthquakes in recent days, but nothing like Wednesday's.

Gina Perrin, founder of the Heavenly Horse Haven, a horse rescue ranch in Anza, said the earthquake spooked 30 horses and other animals on the property.

"They all jumped. Everything jumped. The dogs, the baby sheep, the horses," Perrin said. "It was big enough to slosh water out of the horses' water buckets."

Many Inland agencies saw no effects from the quake.

Capt. Laura Germany, at the Cal Fire/Riverside County Fire Department command center in Perris, said they had not received any reports of damage.

At the Riverside County sheriff's station in Perris, Sgt. Harry Cohen said, some people didn't even feel the quake.

Caltrans inspectors spent about 2.5 hours checking state-maintained roads within 50 miles of the epicenter, but turned up no damage in Riverside County.

Public works employees in San Jacinto, a school official in Hemet, an Indio police sergeant and spokewomen for Hemet-based Valley Health System and Eisenhower Memorial Hospital in Rancho Mirage likewise weren't aware of any damage.

Palm Springs resident Jim Cornett said the quake was the largest he's felt in at least a decade. He was upstairs in his house in the south end of the resort town, 30 miles north of the epicenter.

The wrought-iron banister on his stairs swayed, and his wife's prized vase collection jiggled to the edge of the table, but the shaking stopped just before it went over, he said. Nothing broke at his house.

"It was exciting, and I don't think anyone got hurt. That's the best kind of earthquake," he said.