

Earthquake Experts Encourage Desert Residents To Prepare

Greg Lee, KESQ (Palm Desert television), 9-14-11

PALM SPRINGS -- Hundreds of seismologists and students have gathered in Palm Springs to answer one question: what's shaking? The annual convention of the Southern California Earthquake Center gives experts in the field of natural disasters to share knowledge and new findings about earthquake activity in Southern California. The convention also helps these experts learn ways to communicate their specialties with the general public.

The Coachella Valley is a prime location for the convention, because with the San Andreas fault, many believe we're long overdue for an earthquake. "It really can happen at any moment, it'll start potentially at the Salton Sea and make its way northward," said Southern California Earthquake Center's Mark Benthien. "It could be up to a 7.8 or 8.0 earthquake and shake not only here, but all the way to Los Angeles." The Southland already got a taste of nature's wrath in March when coastal communities were hit with tsunamis caused by the massive earthquake in Japan. "The Chile and Japan tsunamis came not with the first wave, but at the lowest tide of the day, which is nice," said earthquake expert Mark Legg. "But because it lasted for four days, the high tide at night from Chile a year ago, flooded Seal Beach."

The scientists at the earthquake center made it clear, it's not a matter of if a major disaster will hit our area, it's a matter of when. "When people ask me when is the big one coming, I always ask them which one?" said Legg. "Because we have so many faults to choose from since 1857 was the last big one on the San Andreas."

If an earthquake hits, the threat of a tsunami becomes very real. Experts in the science of tsunamis said the best way to prepare is to get informed. "There about 375,000 people in Southern California who live in mapped tsunami inundation zones," said Dr. James Goltz. "They should know they're in the zone, they should know what the evacuation routes are."

Experts also tell people to prepare for a massive power outage in the event of a major earthquake. "If you have any other problems in the grid, you can get the brown outs, the black outs, those kind of effects," said earthquake expert Greg Hardy. "It's kind of a double whammy effect where you have earthquake effects where people are trying to respond to them. And you may have less electricity than you thought you had."

During last week's outage many rushed to gas station and to ATM's, but experts say neither of those things are most important in a disaster. "Power will be out, it may be out for days to a week or longer," said Benthien. "Water supply will be out, that's why you need to have water stored."

The Southern California Earthquake also encourage people to participate in the Great California Shakeout on October 20. "One of the things we can do is practice how to protect ourselves when strong shaking starts," said Kate Long from California Emergency Management. "So the Great California Shakeout is really important in October, because practicing how to do it will really help you to do it when the shaking starts."

For more information on the Great California Shakeout, go to www.shakeout.org.