

After injuries, widespread damage from Napa quake, cleanup ensues

Peter Hecht, Darrell Smith and Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee, 8-25-14

NAPA -- A major earthquake rumbled beneath California's renowned wine county Sunday, injuring more than 200 people as it damaged historic buildings in downtown Napa, ignited gas fires at mobile home parks, knocked down chimneys and shattered windows across a wide region.

Countless residents fled into darkened streets as a result of the 3:20 a.m. quake, measured at magnitude 6.0 by the United States Geological Survey. It was the largest to hit the San Francisco Bay Area since the devastating 6.9-magnitude Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989, prompting Gov. Jerry Brown to declare a state of emergency. The quake jostled Sacramento residents and was felt from Fresno to Chico.

As injured residents streamed in, the Queen of the Valley Medical Center in Napa set up an emergency triage tent shortly after the quake and summoned doctors, surgeons, nurses and other support staff. The most seriously injured included a 13-year-old boy, Nicholas Dillon, who was airlifted to UC Davis Medical Center with injuries that authorities attributed to a collapsed chimney. He was listed in serious condition.

The majority of Queen of the Valley's patients had non-life-threatening injuries. Twelve were admitted to the hospital. Two adults were listed in critical condition, including one who suffered a heart attack and another with multiple fractures, said spokeswoman Vanessa Degier. Other patients who were admitted in fair to serious condition included two suffering from fractured hips and another with a fractured ankle.

Many of the people who didn't require hospitalization were treated for cuts and lacerations, often from stepping on glass or broken objects after being shaken out of bed. More injuries occurred as people were cleaning out damaged structures, hospital officials said.

"The operation rooms are up and running," said Walt Mickens, CEO of Queen of the Valley. "Our community has responded in an extraordinary fashion to a significant event."

Several fires, blamed on gas line ruptures, broke out Sunday morning. The worst destroyed four homes and damaged two others at the Napa Valley Mobile Home Park on Orchard Avenue. Fires also damaged a mobile home on Robin Lane and a single-family residence on Napa's Laurel Street, City Manager Barry Martin said.

Larry Kiddy, a silver-bearded resident at the Napa Valley Mobile Home Park, said he was awakened by a sudden shake and then was violently knocked back into bed as the temblor intensified. "I thought maybe a truck had hit our house," he said. When he looked outside, he saw other homes in "eerie" flames.

A neighbor, Darlene Vanderheyven, saw flames licking near the side of her home. She said she heard hissing from gas lines. "I thought for sure it was going to blow." She repeatedly shouted "Fire!" to her neighbors, bellowing the word out so loudly that "they're probably all deaf now."

Another neighbor, Steve Ruppert, said he saw a man step out of his mobile home only to topple to the ground and gash his leg because his front-door steps had collapsed.

Kiddy said an explosion followed and, "I thought the whole neighborhood was burning down."

The earthquake knocked down and rolled heavy wine barrels like bowling pins, and smashed many hundreds of wine bottles, spilling out hues of burgundy.

Patsy McGaughy, communications director for the Napa Valley Vintners Associations, said the quake's impact on the region's \$13.3 billion industry is unclear. The Napa Valley region includes 400 wineries and another 400 vintners.

"There are broken bottles and glass, barrels that have come down," McGaughy said. "People are going to their facilities to access the damage."

Napa Valley police operations Capt. Steve Potter said many of the region's tourist attractions, including inns and hotels and wineries, remained open "with business as normal." But he advised tourists to call to confirm reservations and check in with wineries. Local residents and visitors also were advised to stay away from downtown Napa "and dangerous areas where there is broken glass and brick and mortar on the ground," Potter said.

Utility crews rushed to repair more than 100 gas line breaks. Officials also reported about 60 water main leaks and said some areas were left with low or no water pressure. Water remained safe to drink, officials said.

City of Napa Public Works Director Jack LaRochelle said assessment teams were sent to inspect quake damage and identify buildings that were deemed structurally unsafe. City Manager Mike Parness said more than 30 buildings were red-tagged as uninhabitable and that "there have been numerous buildings that have been yellow-tagged" – meaning people are allowed limited access to make them safe.

The city reported structural damage at the Napa County Courthouse, an unreinforced masonry structure that bore cracks and a huge gash from fallen timber and bricks. Two historic downtown buildings, the Goodman Library and Sam Kee Laundry, were reported damaged.

With the clean-up beginning in downtown, people were greeted with bright yellow police tape and sounds of swept debris and shattered glass. At the Torc Restaurant on Main Street, mounds of broken china were piled on the floor. Wine bottles and glasses tossed by the temblor were strewn across the bar.

"Nobody was hurt," said chef and owner Sean O'Toole. "Good thing it was 3:30 a.m.," when the quake struck "and not 11:30 when we were open for lunch or later when we were open for dinner and it was even more busy."

O'Toole credited the seismic retrofitting his building underwent in the historic downtown for the relative lack of damage. Other older buildings nearby fared much worse, their brick facades crumbled onto the street.

As the morning wore on Sunday, the curious, residents and tourists alike, flooded into the downtown to take stock of the quake damage and the TV satellite trucks that encamped on street corners. Piles of rubble spread out from the building that is home to the Carpe Diem wine bar at Second and Brown streets, a section of the third floor coming to rest as bricks on the streets below.

Police said there were no reports of looting but announced that officers would maintain a high presence downtown for the next several days.

Meanwhile, Brown issued a state-of-emergency order and said emergency personnel began work shortly after the quake.

“These public safety officials are doing all they can to help residents, and those living in affected areas should follow their guidance and instruction,” Brown said in a statement.

The governor reported in his emergency proclamation that the quake had caused “structural damage to public and private buildings,” toppled power lines and, for a time, left 29,000 customers in the region without electricity.

Kelly Huston, deputy director of the Office of Emergency Services, said officials from multiple state agencies were coming to the region to inspect critical infrastructure, including making safety checks on dams and water and power distribution systems.

“The major challenge is the unknown,” Huston said. “It’s the damage that we haven’t identified yet.”

The quake was followed by a 3.6-magnitude aftershock at 5:47 a.m. The USGS said there was a 54 percent chance of an aftershock of 5.4 or greater over the next seven days.

Residents in the surrounding area Sunday recounted being tossed about from the 3:20 a.m. temblor.

“No pun intended, I’m actually pretty shaken up,” said carpenter Tim Park, who was at his brother’s American Canyon home when the quake hit. “It was violent. I wasn’t here for Loma Prieta, but this was one of the most violent things I’ve experienced.”

Park, 36, said he was planning on going fishing with his brother at 4 a.m. and was already awake when he felt “10 to 15 seconds of pure shaking” and heard a cacophonous roar.

“It sounded like the world was ending, it was so incredibly loud, like a big boom,” he said. “And it wouldn’t stop. That was the weird thing.”

The force of the quake knocked pictures and photos off the walls, and toppled bookcases throughout the house, including one that landed on his brother’s wife in bed, he said. “She got a golf-ball-sized lump on her shoulder,” Park said.

The California Highway Patrol reported road damage in several areas, but said all highways were open and that damaged areas were cordoned off with cones. The CHP reported no damage to Bay Area bridges and said all remain open.

“All are safe for vehicle travel,” the CHP reported on Twitter.

The Altamont Corridor Express scrapped plans to run a special train to Levi’s Stadium for Sunday’s San Francisco 49ers-San Diego Chargers game. Ticket-holders were to be reimbursed for the train fare. The Capitol Corridor line also suspended service Sunday between Roseville and San Jose, pending inspection of the tracks.

The IndyCar events at Sonoma Raceway were held as scheduled Sunday after the track was determined to be undamaged by the quake.

But at the Napa Valley Mobile Home Park, where her house was scorched but survived, Darlene Vanderheyven was evaluating her psyche while trying to come down from the trauma of it all.

Along with her husband, Andre Vanderheyven, she had moved to the park in May – drawn by the views of the vineyards and nearby hills. As they were startled out of bed Sunday, the picturesque setting became

something else.

“This was so violent. ...It was like the bowels of Hell had opened up,” Darlene said from their porch, with Andre and their chihuahua, Dino Grigio, by her side. “It was so wicked.”