

Being prepared for the next big one

Ventura County Reporter, 1-16-14

“If you have a 7.3 out in the desert where there’s nothing but a small Marine base, it’s no big deal. But if you put a magnitude 6.3 in the middle of a city, there’s hell to pay, and the fault in downtown Ventura is capable of a lot more than that.” — Thomas Jordan, who directs USC-based Southern California Earthquake Center

The Southern California Earthquake Center conducted a study that showed the city of Ventura is a hotbed for geological activity and is much more dangerous than previously thought, reported earlier this month in the local daily paper. This report was released just a couple of weeks shy of the 20th anniversary of the one that shook north-central San Fernando Valley to its core at 6.7 magnitude on Jan. 17, 1994, devastating Northridge and CSU, Northridge. The earthquake left 58 dead and damages were estimated at approximately \$25 billion. It took nearly a decade to rebuild the torn apart city, while most of Ventura County remained intact, with the exception of Fillmore, which experienced significant damage. We watched from afar, remembering the jolt and some of the aftershocks and went on our way unaffected.

In March, it will be two years since a magnitude 9.0 earthquake off the coast of Japan devastated nearby towns and communities and caused a series of tsunamis, leading to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster. The death count rose to nearly 19,000 with more than 330,000 left homeless and an estimated \$300 billion in damages. The recovery effort is ongoing. In Ventura County, we braced ourselves for the residual tsunami to hit our shores, which only caused a slight surge, raising docked boats and a temporary high tide. While we have heard stories and rumors, the lines between often seem to blur. The fallout at best is debris washing up on shores from Canada to California; at worst, radiation in the food supply, from fish to cows who eat grass watered by rainfall originating from Pacific Ocean storms.

Despite the various earthquake-related problems Ventura County residents have experienced, we are still very juvenile in actual catastrophes. With the beautiful weather and relatively laidback nature of our Southern California/coastal communities, it’s easy to pass off any sense of urgency to prepare for a natural disaster and say, that will never happen to us. Without a doubt, there are people all over the world who have now endured much devastation and who are looking back and wishing they had done more to prepare.

On Tuesday, Jan. 14, the Ventura County Sheriff’s Department began a three-day event, Operation Ready Ventura 2014, which covered mass evacuation, reception processing, mass care and shelter, and commodity points of distribution. On Thursday, Jan. 17, the exercise will focus on commodity points of distribution and the process for providing potable water during a disaster. During this exercise, responders will test the region’s ability to transport potable water and maintain the integrity of this water in portable water bladders. For those who cannot attend, Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) classes are held throughout the county during the year. If going through any of these various exercises and classes isn’t necessarily appealing, each and every individual should cover certain essentials. At www.ready.gov/earthquakes, there are guides for preparing before, during and after an earthquake.

While we aren’t hitting the panic button, being unprepared or simply uninformed will not bode well during a time of disaster.