

West Coast Earthquake Early Warning system gets \$3.6 million private grant

Jason Henry, San Gabriel Valley Tribune, 2-5-16

A private foundation and two technology giants have thrown their support behind an Earthquake Early Warning system for the West Coast, but the program is still far from its nearly \$40 million goal.

The Bay Area-based Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation pledged \$3.6 million for the U.S. Geological Survey's ShakeAlert system at the White House Summit on Earthquake Resilience on Tuesday, while Amazon and Intel backed the project more indirectly.

The funding furthers research into the technology at Caltech, UC Berkeley and University of Washington.

“Supporting excellent scientists to learn more about nature while creating a warning system that can save lives and property is an objective we are proud to support,” said Robert Kirshner, chief program officer for science at the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, in a statement.

The early warning systems aims to provide an alert seconds to minutes before an earthquake reaches the area. The warning could mitigate damage by automatically halting elevators at a floor, slowing down trains and activating emergency systems.

Amazon Catalyst is supporting research of the University of Washington, while Intel has offered to bring more private sector firms into the mix.

The Moore family's foundation has contributed more than \$10 million to the system since 2011, according to a release from the group.

It's not quite to the \$36 million needed to get it operational, or the \$16 million a year required to run it, proponents said.

U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff helped secure \$8.2 million in funding from the federal government this year and \$6.5 million last year.

“We have had significant success over the past few years in Congress funding the effort to fully build out a West Coast Early Warning system, but the federal government cannot — and will not — fund the system in its entirety,” Schiff said in a statement. “And so I am very pleased that the private sector is getting involved and lending their support, as many companies based on the West Coast will benefit tremendously by the implementation of an early warning system.”

U.S. Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell announced Tuesday an early version of ShakeAlert would enter a beta phase with a limited number of users receiving warnings for the first time. Once fully operational, the system could send alerts directly to people's smart phones and automatically trigger safety systems on elevators and trains, she said. In a statement, Jewell urged Congress to continue supporting the system.

Early warning systems exist in Japan, China, Turkey and Mexico, according to Jewell.

According to USGS, 14,588 earthquakes of magnitude 4.0 or greater occurred globally in 2015.