

Early earthquake warning system in SoCal likely operational within couple years

Rob McMillan, KABC (Los Angeles television), 9-30-16

GRAND TERRACE, Calif. -- An early earthquake warning system could make the difference between life and death for millions in California. So when will the system become reality, and will it be operational before the "big one" hits?

The Salton Sea, which is about 150 miles east of Los Angeles, was the scene of a swarm of earthquakes earlier this week.

"These earthquakes are near the end of the San Andreas but not on it," described earthquake expert Dr. Lucy Jones.

Jones said each small quake brings us ever so closer to a much larger earthquake on the San Andreas Fault.

"Each earthquake is a little change in stress, and that's a little poke on all the faults around it, and we've got this really big cat there that at some point is going to be pushed over the cliff. Each little nudge doesn't have a very good chance of doing it, but you add up enough of them," Jones explained.

These little pokes can lead up to the "big one." That's why an earthquake warning system is so important.

"Unlike Japan, unlike Mexico City, we don't have to lose 9,000 or 5,000 people, and then implement an early warning system. We are doing that before," said Sen. Jerry Hill, D-San Mateo.

At a news conference Thursday, it was announced that the early earthquake warning system is only one to two years away from being operational.

It's an alert that could go out on radio, television or even go straight to your cellphone in the event of a massive quake. So how much warning would you get?

"Somewhere from no warning, in the worst case, to seconds to 10s of seconds. And in the case of very large earthquakes, minutes of warning is actually possible," said Doug Given with the U.S. Geological Survey.