

Rural villages near Mexicali bear brunt of quake's damage

Tony Perry, Los Angeles Times, 4-5-10

Farmers in a string of Mexican villages close to the epicenter of Sunday's magnitude 7.2 earthquake were confronting widespread damage to their homes, schools and churches Monday.

The temblor ripped giant, jagged fissures in the earth's surface throughout the rural area, situated about 25 miles southeast of Mexicali. Walls and roofs of many homes and other structures were badly cracked. Water, sewage and power services were not working, and the two-lane road connecting the area to Mexicali was impassable at several places where the earthquake had torn the pavement apart.

The quake also pushed up water from beneath the earth's surface, leaving the area a flooded, muddy mess. Many homes and schools were rendered mud bogs, while the landscape took on the look of a checkerboard with huge pools of water separated by dry patches.

Jorge Alcaraz, 54, lives in Moreno Valley but was visiting family in Nayarit, the village of his childhood. Surveying his brother's home, which was all but destroyed by the quake, Alcaraz shook his head at the power of the quake as compared with others the area has experienced.

"This is different," he said. "This is very, very different."

Each village is home to several hundred families, who work the surrounding wheat and onion fields. Afraid of aftershocks, many people planned to sleep in their frontyards or in small tent encampments.

The villagers were among the thousands of Mexicans who flocked to an emergency distribution site in the area, where soldiers handed out food rations, water and blankets.

Paula Camacho, 20 and eight months pregnant, and her sister Rosa, 26, received some food and a blanket but did not arrive in time for the limited water supplies. They said they were planning to sleep in a car.

"We now have food. I think my baby will be OK," Camacho said.