

Strong Quake Aftershocks Hit California, Mexico

by NPR Staff and Wires

April 5, 2010



Sandy Huffaker/Getty Images

Alberto Montoya stands outside his home after a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck the area Sunday afternoon in Mexicali, Mexico.

A series of aftershocks hit Southern California and northern Mexico on Monday in the wake of Sunday's 7.2 magnitude quake that shook the area, causing widespread damage and at least two deaths and dozens of injuries.

The strong quake, with its epicenter in Mexico's Baja Peninsula about 115 miles southeast of San Diego, could be felt as far away as Los Angeles and Las Vegas. As many as 20 million people may have felt the quake.

In Mexico, two people were killed and at least 100 were injured. Several aftershocks hit Monday morning.

In Calexico, Calif., the U.S. border town nearest the quake, police guarded buildings damaged because they were too old to have been constructed with updated codes. Bricks fell from one-story buildings and windows were shattered.

"Throughout the city, there's a lot of ... injuries, but the downtown area is what got hit the worst, at least with property damage," Calexico Fire Capt. Wally Castro said.

"It felt like I was in a canoe in the middle of the ocean," Rosendo Garcia, 44, said of the quake. He said that five homes at his trailer park in Calexico were seriously damaged. His wife, Elvia Garcia, 47, said her refrigerator door flew open and all of the food fell out. Her plates, TV and computer all smashed to the floor.

Police Lt. Gonzalo Gerardo said the town was concerned about the effect of aftershocks on the buildings, some of which had 2-inch-wide wall cracks.

"I was out there looking at the cracks and saying this could come down anytime," he said.

Katie Orr, a reporter with NPR member station KPBS, told *Morning Edition* that authorities had "cut off access" to the downtown area and declared a state of emergency.

"The city manager expects downtown to be closed for quite some time," Orr told NPR. "Only shop owners are being allowed in to see if their businesses have been damaged."

Across the U.S.-Mexico border, closer to the quake's epicenter, the damage was likely to be more severe but reports from the hardest-hit town of Mexicali were still sketchy on Monday, Orr said.

Several buildings reportedly collapsed in the city and there were numerous reports of fires due to broken gas lines and exploded propane tanks, she said.



Guillermo Arias/AP

A car passes over a crack on the road of the Mexicali-Tijuana highway made by a 7.2 earthquake in Mexicali, Mexico, Sunday.

In San Diego, water sloshed in pools, pictures fell from walls and some water mains reportedly were broken, Orr said.

Sporadic power outages were reported in Southern California and Arizona.

Jacqueline Land said her king-size bed in her second-floor Phoenix-area apartment felt like a boat gently swaying on the ocean.

"I thought to myself, 'That can't be an earthquake. I'm in Arizona,' " she said.

In Yuma, Ariz., near the California line and the Mexican border, police department spokesman Clint Norred said police responded to numerous building alarms that the quake tripped, but there were no reports of real damage.

"In my house, it knocked a couple of things off the wall" and cut power for 15 minutes, he said.

USGS geophysicist Paul Caruso said Sunday's quake was along the Laguna Salada fault, which is part of the larger San Andreas system.

Caruso told NPR that the quake was the strongest the area had experienced since the 1940 Imperial Valley Earthquake, which measured magnitude 6.9 and was centered 5 miles north of Calexico.

He said Sunday's temblor was similar in size and depth to the magnitude 7 quake that hit Haiti earlier this year, but that it was farther away from major population centers.