

Southern Californians Are Being Dared to Prepare

In just 10–20 seconds, the 1994 Northridge earthquake devastated urban areas northwest of Los Angeles and became one of the costliest natural disasters in U.S. history. Try to imagine stronger shaking lasting for 2 to 4 minutes, generated by twenty Northridge-sized earthquakes arrayed across Southern California. This is the scenario driving the Dare to Prepare campaign, a yearlong effort to strengthen awareness of and readiness for “the Big One,” the next great earthquake along the southern San Andreas fault.

The campaign was launched on January 9, 2007, exactly 150 years after a major earthquake last rocked southern portions

of the San Andreas. The magnitude 7.9 Fort Tejon quake ruptured 225 miles of the fault in 1857. Scientists have found that large earthquakes recur along the southern San Andreas about every 150 years, so another big one is due, especially along the

southernmost segment of the fault, where the last large temblor occurred more than 300 years ago. Public officials and seismologists agree that

Year and magnitude of latest large San Andreas quakes. Illustration courtesy of Earthquake Country Alliance.

today, another Fort Tejon-sized quake could be catastrophic, producing economic losses of more than \$150 billion.

In the face of such news, Dare to Prepare aims to replace resignation with readiness. The theme of the campaign, “Secure Your Space,” emphasizes that although the Big One is inevitable, there are many things that Southern Californians can and should do now to reduce the quake’s impact on their homes, businesses, and communities. By securing buildings and their contents, by preparing disaster plans and supply kits, and by learning what to do during and after earthquakes, people can assure that their families, employees, customers, and property have the best possible chance of surviving the Big One and its aftermath.

The campaign Web site, www.daretoprepare.org, provides information about these readiness strategies. A fall media

campaign is planned to boost public awareness of preparedness measures and of the seismic hazards they protect against. Dare to Prepare is mobilizing the “Movers and Shakers,” a cadre of elected officials and business and community leaders, to promote the campaign. Plans also include distributing several million copies of *Putting Down Roots in Earthquake Country*, a handbook on earthquakes and how to prepare for them. Local preparedness fairs, presentations, training sessions, and other events will be held, some featuring “Big Shaker,” a 24-foot mobile shake simulator. The campaign will culminate in 2008 with the Great Southern California Shakeout, the largest-ever earthquake response exercise involving government, businesses, schools, and the public.

Dare to Prepare has been organized by the Earthquake Country Alliance, a public-private partnership of earthquake professionals, emergency managers, government officials, business and community leaders, and others. The Alliance is led by Lucy Jones, seismologist with the United States Geological Survey (USGS); Tom Jordan, director of the Southern California Earthquake Center (SCEC), a National Science Foundation (NSF)/USGS center; and Ellis Stanley, general manager of the City of Los Angeles Emergency Preparedness Department. SCEC provides administrative and communications support for the Alliance and Dare to Prepare.

USGS and the other agencies of the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) are actively involved with SCEC and the Alliance. Representatives of USGS, NSF, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are members of the Alliance. USGS and NSF provide major support for SCEC, and USGS, NSF, FEMA, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology are all SCEC research or program partners.

Dare to Prepare is one of several complementary projects undertaken or planned by the Alliance. Another is a scientific research effort that will produce a detailed picture of the likely location, timing, power, and effects of the Big One; Dare to Prepare’s 2008 earthquake response exercise will be designed around this scenario. At the news conference that launched Dare to Prepare, Jones spoke about what scientists have been learning and the consequent rationale for the campaign: “The more we know, the greater our concern, so we all must act now—individually and in our communities. . . . We’re all in this together, and it is up to each of us to dare to prepare.”