

Not My Fault: Kudos to the rising number of ShakeOut participants

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard
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Thank you to everyone who participated in Thursday's ShakeOut earthquake drill. North Coast registrations were up 16% over 2017 and included schools, businesses, government agencies, nonprofits and volunteer organizations, museums, tribes and individuals. Give yourself a pat on the back if you Dropped, Covered, and Held On or took part in other recent ShakeOut activities.

Humboldt and Mendocino Counties tested their emergency notification systems. In the space of a minute, I received a text, email and phone call through the Everbridge notification system. I won't be notified before a real earthquake, but it's good to know the system works for events such as floods, distant tsunamis, storms, fires or human-caused incidents when I need to be alerted or evacuate. If you didn't receive notice last Thursday, it's most likely because you haven't enrolled in the system. If you think you are signed up and didn't receive anything, call your County Office of Emergency Services to find out what happened. And you can still sign up – just search for “name of your county emergency notification” and fill out the simple on-line form or call your OES office.

I spent ShakeOut at Redwood Coast Montessori, a charter school in Manila. On Tuesday and Wednesday of ShakeOut week, classes participated in an earthquake-tsunami education activity coordinated by Ryan Aylward and Troy Nicolini of the Eureka NWS Forecast Office. On ShakeOut day, principal Bryan Little started the drill with his blow horn. Students crouched under their desks and counted out the length of their pretend earthquake. After about 90 seconds, everyone left their classrooms, grabbed their backpacks by the door (already supplied with emergency provisions) and headed to the tsunami evacuation site atop the highest dune in the area.

This was the second full evacuation drill this academic year and the students were very comfortable with the procedure – staying in classroom lines so that the teachers could quickly count the group. Everyone was calm, walking at a steady pace, and we reached the evacuation spot in under ten minutes from when the blow horn had gone off. Everyone knew about this drill ahead of time, but for the rest of the year, drills will come

at random times, making this school a contender for the most tsunami-prepared spot in the county.

Here is a shout out to some of the North Coast participants. Leading the pack, as usual, were schools. From Pre-K to colleges, the education sector accounted for the largest block of participants. Next were government organizations (local, state and federal), health care providers and groups, and preparedness organizations. Tribal groups made a strong showing. The Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation, Yurok Tribe, Bear River Rancheria, Blue Lake Rancheria and Trinidad Rancheria all signed on. You can find a complete list of Humboldt County registrants at <https://www.shakeout.org/california/participants.php?st=Humboldt>, and change 'Humboldt' to your county to find out their numbers.

Kudos to St. Albans Episcopal Church, our first ever faith-based registrant. Last Sunday during the service, the entire congregation participated in a ShakeOut drill. They have also held workshops and provided preparedness materials. You are a role model for all religious communities.

While it was a good ShakeOut year, we can do better. There are noticeable gaps. First and foremost, tourist-related industries. Not a single hotel or restaurant participated in our three-county region. This is alarming because out-of-town visitors are often the most vulnerable group in a disaster. Tourists aren't familiar with the area or its hazards and have an “on vacation” mentality, which makes them slow to respond appropriately.

We still have few businesses engaged in ShakeOut – especially our larger retail stores. In the January 2010 earthquake, the largest group of injuries were at the Bayshore Mall, some caused by staff and security personnel who were frightened themselves and told patrons to run. I would be happy to work with retailers individually or with mall management to provide better training and guidelines.

Topping off ShakeOut week, Mother Nature gave us a little wink, a series of earthquakes off shore of Vancouver Island late Sunday night. The magnitude 6.6, 6.8 and 6.5 earthquakes were too far offshore to cause damage and not large enough to pose a tsunami threat. We share a common geologic history with the Pacific Northwest. For more than a 100 million years, a very large plate (the Farallon plate), subducted beneath the North American continent. This slow, grinding collision produced the

Rockies, the Sierras and everything in between. The Farallon plate is still alive and well off the coast of Mexico and South America (the Cocos and Nazca plates), but most of the central and northern part is gone and today, only the Juan de Fuca remains.

The northern (Explorer plate off Canada) and southern (Gorda plate off Northern California) Juan de Fuca plate is characterized by internal deformation and numerous earthquakes. Sunday's earthquakes were on strike-slip faults in the Explorer plate, similar to the 1980 and 2010 offshore Humboldt earthquakes. My most likely candidate for the next damaging North Coast earthquake is something like this week's Explorer sequence, and could involve several large quakes occurring minutes to hours or days apart.

Preparedness tip of the week: Rechargeable LED lighting is a great way to make sure you have light when an earthquake occurs or other events cause a sudden blackout. These inexpensive lights with a power failure feature can act as a nightlight in normal times but will automatically turn on when the power goes out and can be unplugged and used as a flashlight if you need one.

Lori Dengler, PhD is an emeritus professor of geology at Humboldt State University, and an expert in tsunami and earthquake hazards. Questions or comments about this column, or want a free copy of the preparedness magazine "Living on Shaky Ground"? Leave a message at (707) 826-6019 or email Kamome@humboldt.edu

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