



NEWS RELEASE

Tennessee Emergency Management Agency

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RELEASE:
At Will

TEMA, MEMA Join CUSEC for Earthquake Awareness Week

(MEMPHIS, Tennessee) – When most Americans think of earthquakes, they think of California. Actually, though, most experts say the strongest earthquake ever in the 48 contiguous states was centered in Missouri.

That's why the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency and the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency are joining the Central United States Earthquake Consortium (CUSEC) in promoting earthquake awareness week January 20-26.

"Damaging earthquakes in the central United States began with the great New Madrid earthquakes of 1811-1812," said CUSEC Director Jim Wilkerson. "One of the hundreds of quakes is believed to have been a magnitude 8-plus. Most people today assume that this series was the only significant damaging events in the central U.S., there have been at least 20 damaging earthquakes here since 1812. Two of them were capable of causing the kind of damage observed in Northridge, California, in 1994, and Kobe, Japan, in 1995."

"The fact is, there were three earthquakes of Kobe-potential in the central U.S. within 85 years, but none in the past 190 years," said TEMA Director John White. "That makes me very confident, unfortunately, that there will be another – and sooner rather than later."

"Major earthquakes happen again and again in a given geographic area," said MEMA Director Robert Latham. "It's just a matter of time."

The first post-1812 quake to approach Kobe force was January 4, 1843, near Marked Tree, Ark. With an estimated magnitude of 6.4, that earthquake was felt over much of the eastern U.S. and caused damage in both Memphis and St. Louis.

The second came early Halloween morning in 1895, with an estimated magnitude of 6.8 and an epicenter near the small town of Charleston, Mo. It was better documented than '43 because there were more people in the affected area. The 5:15 a.m. quake shook residents out of their beds and damaged every building in the commercial area of Charleston. At Hickman, Ky., people "...rushed into the streets, panic stricken, [and] furniture was tossed to and fro." At Cairo, Ill., many chimneys were shaken down, and the public library was damaged. In Chicago, sleepers were awakened, furniture shaken and pictures fell from the walls. In Vincennes, Ind., houses were badly shaken and people greatly excited. Two children were knocked out of bed. In St. Louis, chimneys were destroyed and loose objects fell to the floor. Pictures were thrown from walls in Louisville. In Kansas City, Mo., objects were overturned. A new lake was formed south of Henson Lake, Mo., and spouts of water and sand were reported. Chimneys were shaken down in Memphis. Dishes were broken and pictures fell from walls as far away as Washington D.C. The earthquake was felt along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts.

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The central U.S. population was still relatively small in 1895. Today, more than 12 million people live in the region. The Northridge earthquake, magnitude 6.7, was in a populated area where people were prepared for earthquakes, yet 57 people died and \$30 billion dollars of damage was done. The Kobe earthquake, magnitude 6.9, also occurred in a populated area, but one that was not prepared for earthquakes, and over 5,000 people died and over \$235 billion dollars of damage has been estimated. The preparedness level in the central U.S. is closer to Kobe than to Northridge. It is important to remember that earthquake preparedness should become part of our daily lives. Major earthquakes happen again and again. It is simply a matter of time.

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