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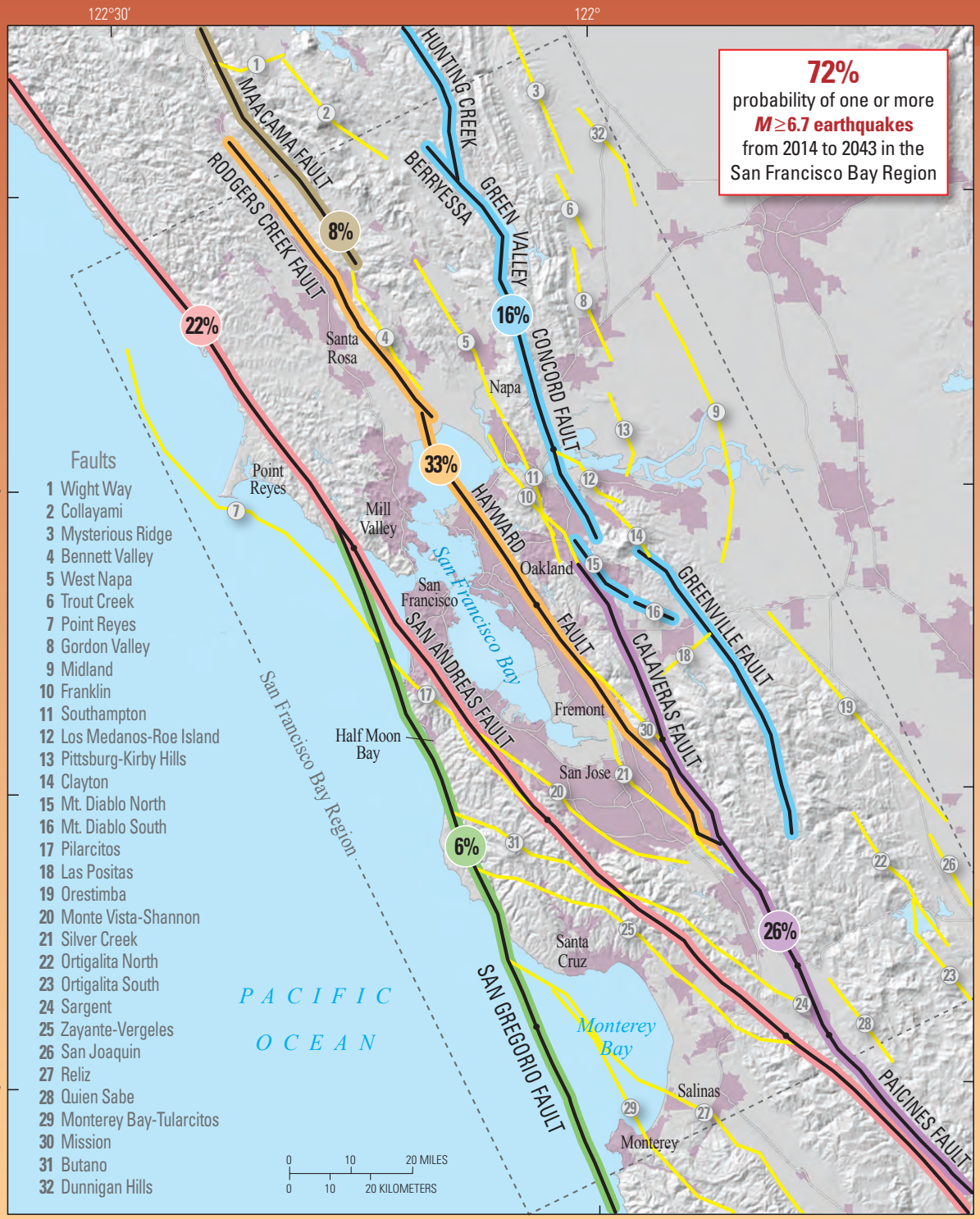
Earthquake Outlook for the San Francisco Bay Region 2014–2043



Using information from recent earthquakes, improved mapping of active faults, and a new model for estimating earthquake probabilities, the 2014 Working Group on California Earthquake Probabilities updated the 30-year earthquake forecast for California. They concluded that there is a 72 percent probability (or likelihood) of at least one earthquake of magnitude 6.7 or greater striking somewhere in the San Francisco Bay region before 2043. Earthquakes this large are capable of causing widespread damage; therefore, communities in the region should take simple steps to help reduce injuries, damage, and disruption, as well as accelerate recovery from these earthquakes.

Building damaged in 2014 South Napa earthquake. Photograph by Erol Kalkan, U.S. Geological Survey.

EXPLANATION

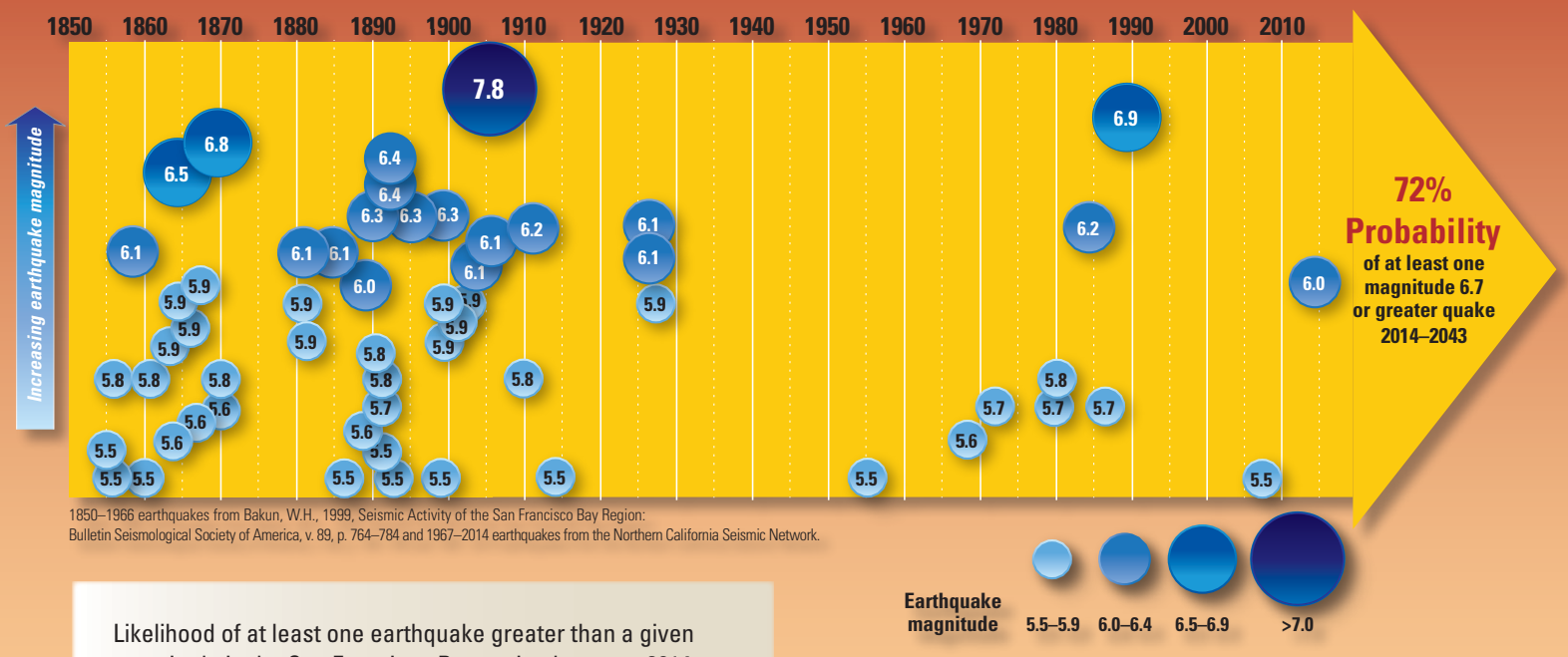
- Major plate boundary faults
- Lesser-known smaller faults
- Urban areas

Map of known active faults in the San Francisco Bay region. The 72 percent probability of a magnitude 6.7 or greater earthquake includes the well-known major plate-boundary faults, lesser-known faults, and unknown faults. The percentage shown within each colored circle is the probability that a magnitude 6.7 or greater earthquake will occur somewhere on that fault system by the year 2043. The probability that a magnitude 6.7 or greater earthquake will involve one of the lesser-known faults is 13 percent.

U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Geological Survey

Fact Sheet 2016–3020
June 2016

San Francisco Bay Region Earthquake Timeline



1850–1966 earthquakes from Bakun, W.H., 1999, Seismic Activity of the San Francisco Bay Region: Bulletin Seismological Society of America, v. 89, p. 764–784 and 1967–2014 earthquakes from the Northern California Seismic Network.

Likelihood of at least one earthquake greater than a given magnitude in the San Francisco Bay region between 2014 and 2043.

Magnitude (*M*)	30-year likelihood of at least one earthquake in the San Francisco Bay region
$M \geq 6.0$	98 percent
$M \geq 6.7$	72 percent
$M \geq 7.0$	51 percent
$M \geq 7.5$	20 percent

Timeline of magnitude 5.5 and greater earthquakes in the San Francisco Bay region 1850–2014. In the 50 years prior to 1906, there were 13 earthquakes with a magnitude between 6 and 7, but only 6 earthquakes of similar magnitude in the 110 years since 1906. The rate of large earthquakes is expected to increase from this low level as tectonic plate movements continue to increase the stress on the faults in the region.

Earthquake Preparedness Helps

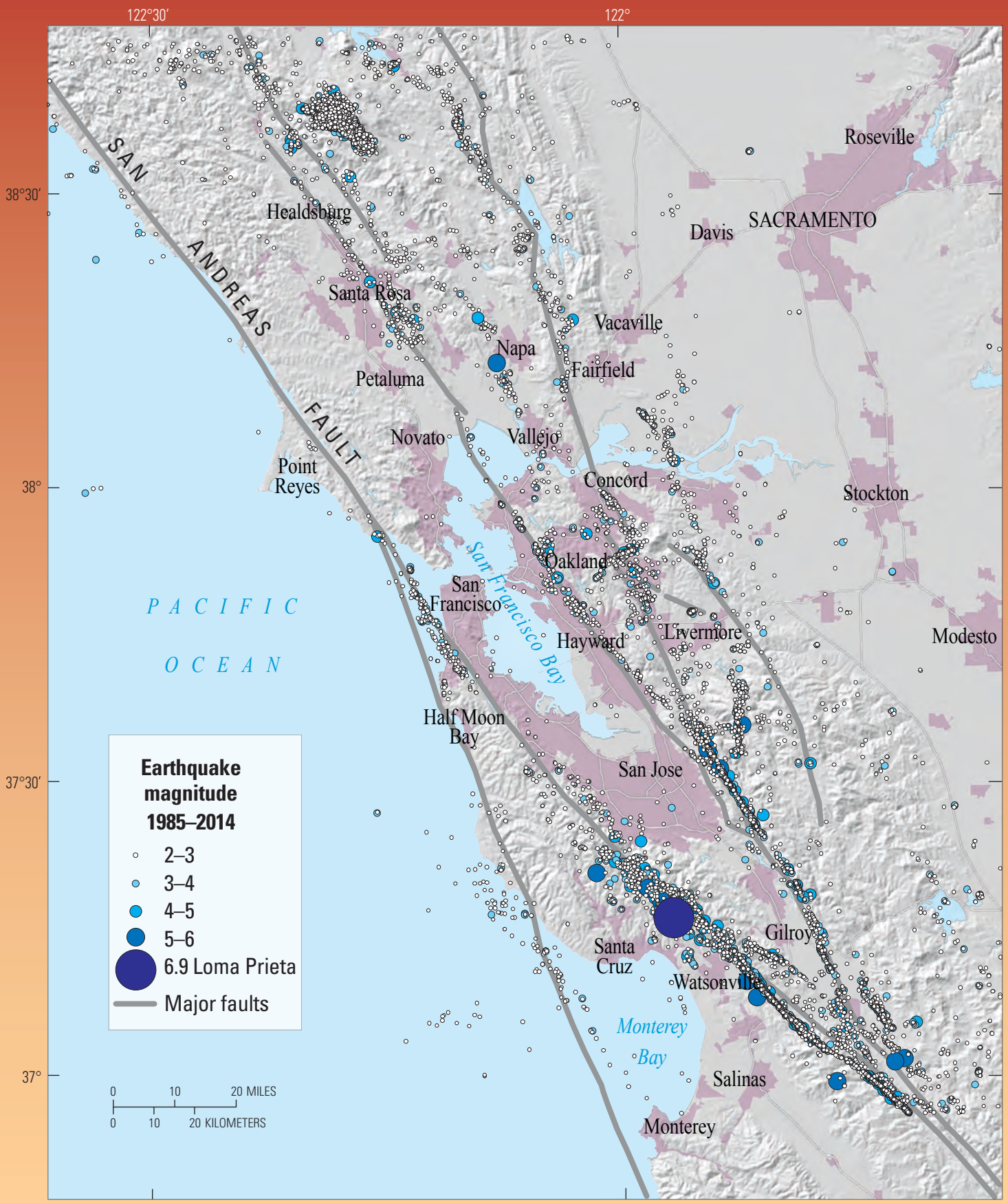
Early Sunday morning on August 24, 2014, the residents of Napa, California, were jolted awake by a strong, magnitude 6.0 earthquake. Within 30 minutes, the staff of Becoming Independent, a non-profit organization that helps adults with intellectual disabilities lead independent lives, called the people they serve in the affected area. The staff quickly visited all of the clients that needed help with cleanup and making their homes safe, a task made easier because both groups were trained in disaster preparedness and the clients had emergency kits with needed supplies on hand. The South Napa earthquake shifted houses off their foundations, damaged chimneys, started fires, and broke water mains throughout the city, causing hundreds of millions of dollars in economic losses. Many historic masonry buildings in downtown Napa were damaged. The earthquake was the largest in the San Francisco Bay region since the 1989 magnitude 6.9 Loma Prieta earthquake and a clear reminder of the seismic vulnerability of the region. The staff and clients of Becoming Independent showed that understanding and preparing for these events can improve how we live with future earthquakes.

Why Does the San Francisco Bay Region Have Earthquakes?

The same geologic process that is responsible for the San Francisco Bay region's beautiful coastlines, bays, hills, and valleys is also the primary driving force for earthquakes along faults in the region. The Bay region is located within the active boundary between the Pacific and the North American tectonic plates, where the Pacific plate slowly and continually slides northwest past the North American plate. The San Andreas Fault, on which two magnitude 7.8–7.9 earthquakes have occurred in historical time, including the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, is the fastest slipping fault along the plate boundary. Other major plate boundary faults in the San Francisco Bay region include the Hayward, Rodgers Creek, Calaveras, Maacama, San Gregorio, Concord, Green Valley, and Greenville Faults.

How Do Scientists Calculate Earthquake Probability?

Scientists rely upon a variety of techniques to help understand the rate and magnitude of past earthquakes in order to estimate the likelihood of future earthquakes. The Global Positioning System (GPS) and other land surveying and geologic techniques have allowed scientists to make more accurate measurements of how the current plate motions—totaling 1.6 inches per year across the San Francisco Bay region—distribute stress onto these individual faults. Balancing plate motions with the slip during large earthquakes and slow creep on faults allows scientists to calculate average rates of earthquake occurrence over periods of hundreds to thousands of years. (Continued on page 4)



Map of earthquakes greater than magnitude 2.0 in the San Francisco Bay region from 1985–2014. Small earthquakes occur on both major faults (shown by the gray lines) and minor faults (not shown). Because of the variability of fault geometry, earthquakes at depth do not always coincide with the mapped faults at the Earth's surface. There are sections of major faults, particularly the San Andreas Fault, with few or no small earthquakes but they will produce large earthquakes in the future. Compiled from the Northern California Seismic Network.

(Continued from page 2). A trench excavated across the Hayward Fault in Fremont revealed evidence of 12 large earthquakes over the past 1,900 years. The time interval between these earthquakes ranged from about 100 to 210 years. Historical records indicate that the most recent large earthquake on this fault occurred in 1868. However, detailed information about other past earthquakes in the San Francisco Bay region is difficult to obtain because seismograph records only go back to about 1900, historical accounts are sparse before 1850, and there are limited locations where faults can be trenched to identify and date prehistoric earthquakes.

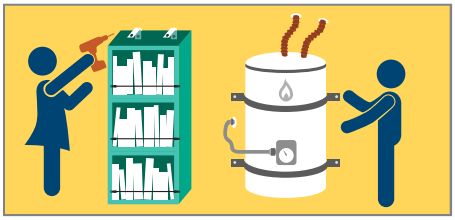
Calculating accurate earthquake probabilities for short periods, such as 30 years, is also challenging. Although the 30-year time interval is convenient for humans, it is much less than the average time between large earthquakes on these faults, which can range from hundreds to thousands of years. The rate of large earthquakes in the San Francisco Bay region was high in the late 1800s but dropped abruptly after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake on the San Andreas Fault. Scientists believe that the post-1906 earthquake rate decreased because the large amount of slip along the San Andreas Fault in 1906 temporarily reduced the stress on many of the faults in the region. However, the ongoing motion of the tectonic plates began rebuilding stresses after the 1906 event, and earthquakes larger than magnitude 5.5 resumed during the second half of the 20th century. Future large, damaging earthquakes in the San Francisco Bay region, similar in size to the 1989 Loma Prieta and 1906 San Francisco earthquakes, may or may not be accompanied by the level of earthquake activity observed in the late 1800s.

The 2014 Uniform California Earthquake Rupture Forecast version 3 (http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2015/3009/) provides an updated estimate of the likelihood of large earthquakes in California over a 30-year time window from 2014 to 2043. The forecast accounts for how fast stress is accumulating on each fault due to plate motions and the time since its most recent large earthquake(s). In updating the probability calculations, scientists used a more complete set of faults for the San Francisco Bay region than those used in the previous (2008) calculations, adding 32 smaller faults to the 5 major fault systems. The new study has also incorporated more options for how multiple faults might rupture together in large earthquakes.

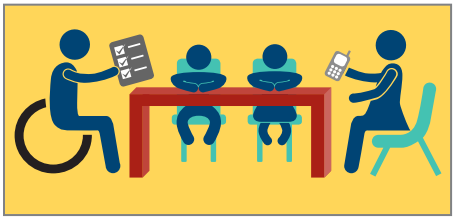
Seven Steps to Earthquake Safety

PREPARE

Before the next big earthquake we recommend these four steps that will make you, your family, or your workplace better prepared to survive and recover quickly:

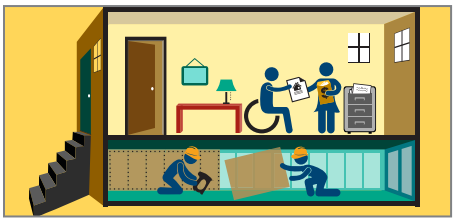


Step 1: Secure your space by identifying hazards and securing moveable items.



Step 2: Plan to be safe by creating a disaster plan and deciding how you will communicate in an emergency.

Step 3: Organize disaster supplies in convenient locations.



Step 4: Minimize financial hardship by organizing important documents, strengthening your property, and considering insurance.

SURVIVE

During the next big earthquake, and immediately after, is when your level of preparedness will make a difference in how you and others survive and can respond to emergencies:

Step 5: Drop, Cover, and Hold On when the earth shakes.

Step 6: Improve safety after earthquakes by evacuating if necessary, helping the injured, and preventing further injuries or damage.

RECOVER

After the immediate threat of the earthquake has passed, your level of preparedness will determine your quality of life in the weeks and months that follow:

Step 7: Reconnect and Restore. Restore daily life by reconnecting with others, repairing damage, and rebuilding community.

Adapted from Seven Steps To Earthquake Safety
http://earthquakecountry.org/sevensteps/

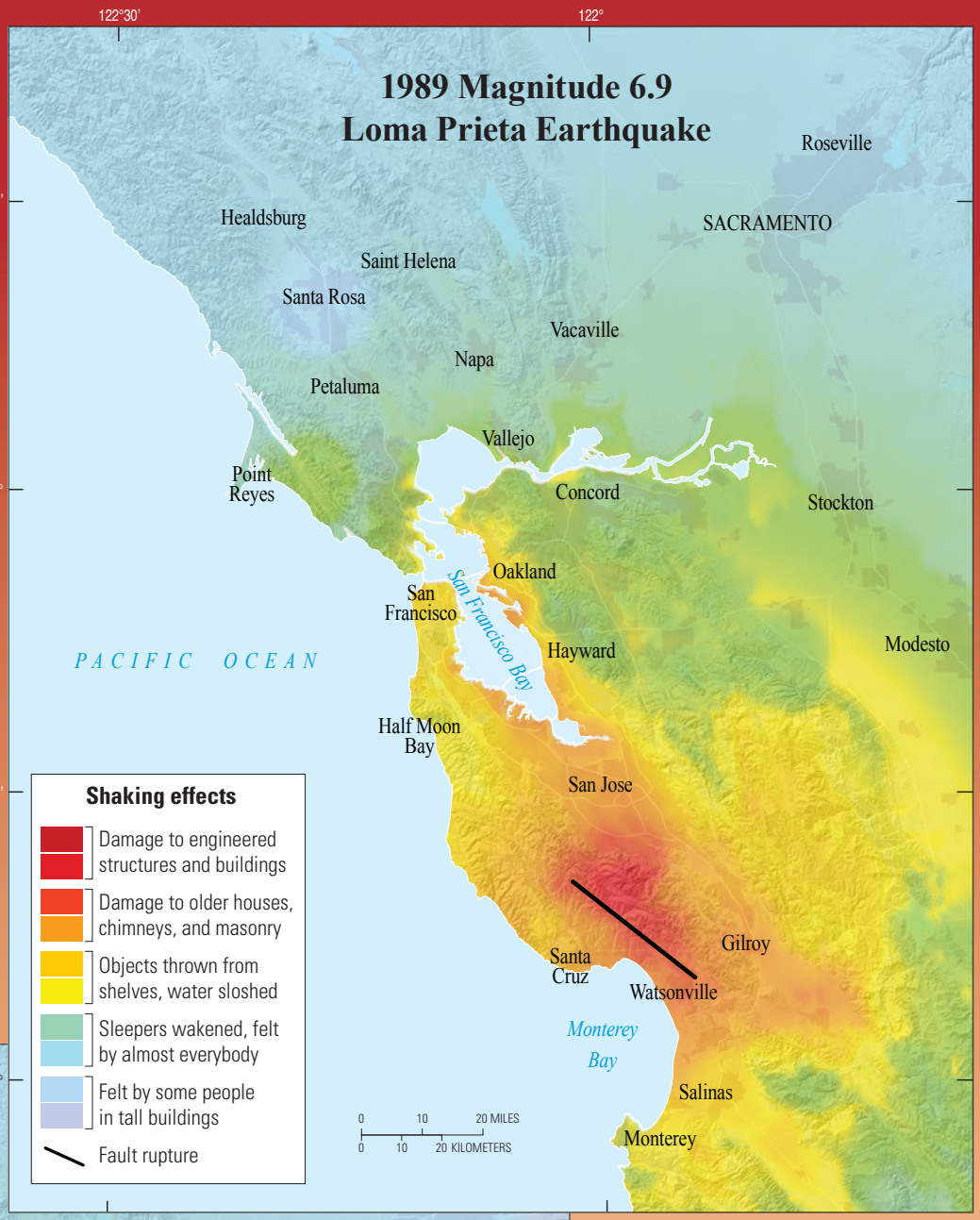
Probabilities of Earthquakes in the San Francisco Bay Region

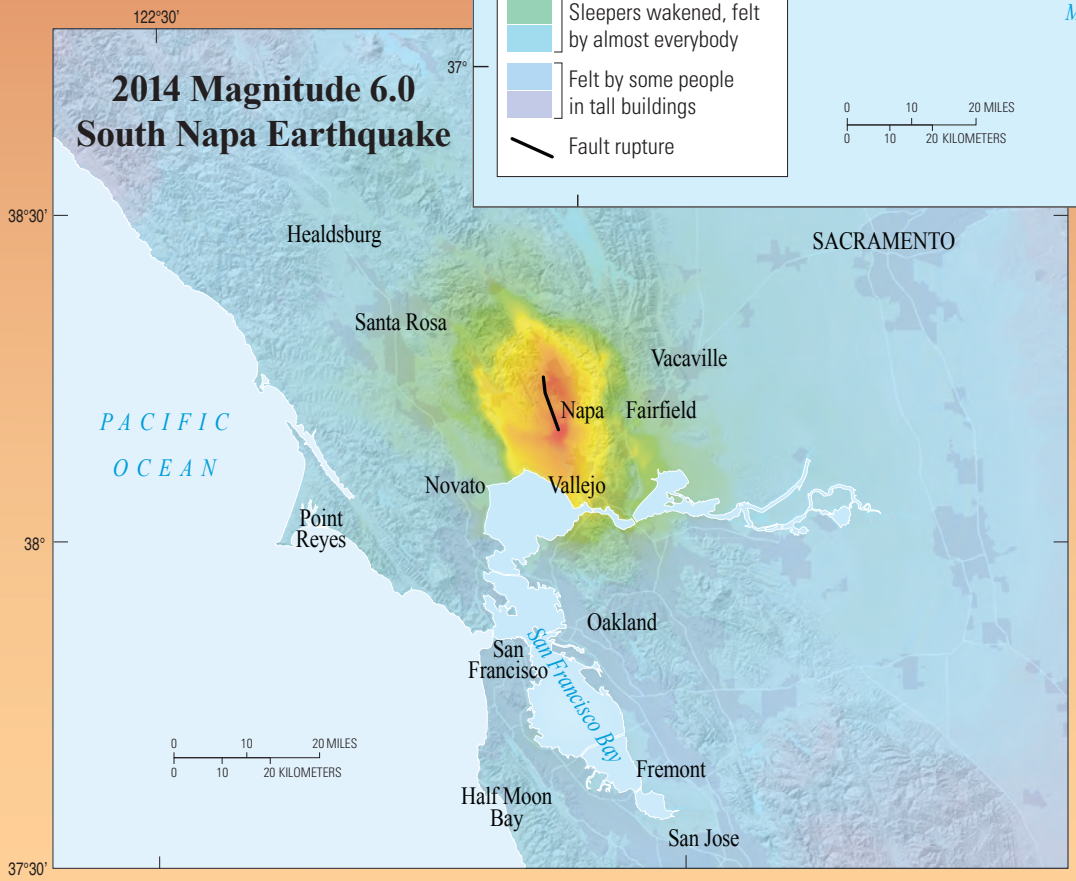
Smaller earthquakes occur more frequently than larger earthquakes. The probability that an earthquake of magnitude 6.0 or larger will occur before 2043 is 98 percent. The probability of at least one earthquake of magnitude 6.7 or larger in the San Francisco Bay region is 72 percent, and for at least one earthquake of magnitude 7.0 or larger it is 51 percent. These probabilities include earthquakes on the major faults, lesser-known faults, and unknown faults.

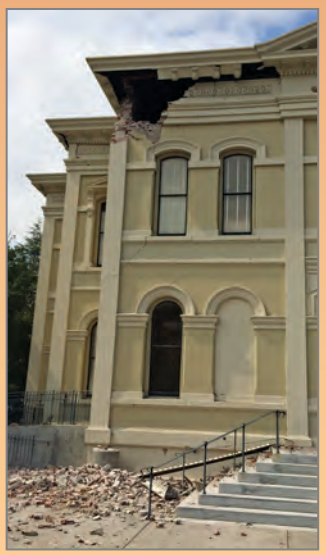
The probability of a large earthquake occurring on an individual fault in the San Francisco region is lower than the probability of an earthquake occurring anywhere in the region. The faults in the region with the highest estimated probability of generating damaging earthquakes between 2014 and 2043 are the Hayward, Rodgers Creek, Calaveras, and San Andreas Faults. In this 30-year period, the probability of an earthquake of magnitude 6.7 or larger occurring is 22 percent along the San Andreas Fault and 33 percent for the Hayward or Rodgers Creek Faults. Individual sections of these faults have lower probabilities for large earthquakes to occur (continued on page 6);

Maps showing intensity of ground shaking for the South Napa and Loma Prieta earthquakes. The black lines show the location of fault slip at depth. The maps illustrate how the area subjected to strong shaking increases with increasing earthquake magnitude.

Road damage from the Loma Prieta earthquake. Photograph by H.G. Wilshire, U.S. Geological Survey.







Damaged building in downtown Napa. Photograph by Erol Kalkan, U.S. Geological Survey.

Additional Earthquake Resources

American Red Cross – Bay Area (http://www.redcross.org/local/northern-california-coastal)
Association of Bay Area Governments (http://resilience.abag.ca.gov/earthquakes/)
Bay Area Earthquake Alliance (http://bayquakealliance.org/)
California Earthquake Authority (http://www.californiarocks.com/)
California Geological Survey (http://www.consrv.ca.gov/cgs/geologic_hazards/earthquakes)
Did You Feel It? (http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/dyfi/)
Earthquake Country Alliance (http://earthquakecountry.org/)
Putting Down Roots in Earthquake Country (http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/2005/15/)
ShakeAlert – An Earthquake Early Warning System for the United States West Coast (http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2014/3083/)
ShakeMap (http://www.cisn.org/shakemap/nc/shake/index.html)
ShakeOut.org (http://www.shakeout.org/california/bayarea/)
Uniform California Earthquake Rupture Fault version 3 Fact Sheet (http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2015/3009/)
United Policyholders (http://www.uphelp.org/)
USGS Real-Time Earthquakes (http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/map/)

Damaged building in downtown Napa. Photograph by Erol Kalkan, U.S. Geological Survey.

(continued from page 5) however, an earthquake of magnitude 6.7 or larger will cause strong shaking over a broad area. Therefore, it is important to estimate the probability of a large earthquake occurring anywhere in the San Francisco Bay region.

What is the Likelihood That an Earthquake Will Affect You?

Earthquake probabilities are only one component in the evaluation of earthquake hazards. Higher magnitude earthquakes have broader areas of intense shaking and cause more damage than lower magnitude earthquakes. In a magnitude 6.0 earthquake, strong shaking and damage are confined to a localized area, as illustrated by the 2014 South Napa earthquake. In comparison, the 1989 magnitude 6.9 Loma Prieta earthquake caused damage over a region nearly 100 miles long. Local soil and geologic conditions, bedrock type, quality of building construction, and susceptibility to flooding (caused by dam or levee failure) can also affect the amount of damage at a particular site. This was dramatically demonstrated by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, which devastated vulnerable parts of Oakland and San Francisco, more than 50 miles from the fault rupture.

How Can You Protect Yourself and Your Family?

Taking simple steps before and during earthquakes can help protect you and your family, as well as speed your recovery from an earthquake.

Before the next earthquake:

- Assess your home and work space, identify hazards, and secure moveable items.
- Create an emergency plan and organize disaster supplies to sustain you and your family for 72 hours or longer.
- Practice "Drop, Cover, and Hold On" to protect yourself when the ground begins to shake. Learn and practice what to do at home, work, or in school.
- Stay prepared by repeating these steps on a regular basis. For example, reassess your preparedness every year and participate in the annual Great California ShakeOut drill on the third Thursday in October.

Lack of adequate shear walls on the garage level exacerbated damage to this building at the corner of Beach and Divisadero in the Marina District, San Francisco, during the October 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

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ISSN 2327-6916 (print) ISSN 2327-6932 (online)
http://dx.doi.org/10.3133/fs20163020