



# NEWS RELEASE

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE  
FORT RILEY, KANSAS 66442  
TELEPHONE: (785) 239-2022 FAX: (785) 239-2592  
AFTER HOURS 239-2222  
EMAIL: 19extinform@riley.army.mil  
www.riley.army.mil



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

Christie Vanover, Media Relations Assistant

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## EARTHQUAKES CAN STRIKE HEARTLAND

By Christie Vanover  
Staff Writer

As an earthquake shook the state of Washington last week, soldiers at Fort Lewis felt its tremors.

"I was sitting here writing away on a story and the next thing I knew, the ground started shaking," said Spec. Lorin Smith, journalist, Fort Lewis. "I got under a desk and waited for it to end."

The earthquake that hit Washington Feb. 28 at 10:55 a.m. had a preliminary magnitude of 6.8. It was declared the second-worst earthquake in recent Washington history.

Immediately after the quake, Smith said people in his office tried to reach their family members to let them know they were all okay.

Smith, who is from Washington, was worried about his parents who live close by.

"I tried to call my mom and I was all nervous because my dad works on the 17th floor in a building in Seattle," he said. "Fortunately, they were both okay."

Some thought the original vibrations were a result of field training.

"We thought it was artillery firing. Then it started to get more intense and the building started rocking. It lasted about 45 seconds and it was all over," said Joe Hitt, spokesperson, Fort Lewis.

Although buildings rocked and the ground shook, Fort Lewis reported no injuries and very little damage.

"Some buildings had roofing tiles fall off and a couple of chimneys cracked," said Hitt. A couple of vacant old wooden buildings also collapsed to the ground.

Following the earthquake, personnel were allowed to go home and check their homes on and off the installation, but it did not affect routine Fort Lewis operations.

Historically, Kansas is also an epicenter for significant earthquakes. More than a century ago, Kansas' largest earthquake was reported in the Manhattan area.

“There is a fairly large geographical structure known as the Nemaha Ridge that runs through the area,” said Lee Allison, state geologist of Kansas and director of Kansas Geological Survey. “We think the earthquakes are related to one or more faults along that ridge.

“From 1867-1976, we have recorded about 25 earthquakes. From 1977-1989, we had instruments on loan and we recorded about 100 earthquakes,” said Allison.

Dr. Stephen Gao, assistant professor, KSU Department of Geology, has been studying the structure and dynamics of the Earth’s crust for a decade.

Gao is currently working on mapping the upper crust of the Manhattan area in hopes he will determine if a fault lies beneath the surface.

“We predict there are some active faults and that there could be an earthquake in the future,” he said.

His research team has detected approximately 10-20 very small earthquakes that have occurred during the past five-months, but data is still being checked.

“At this stage we don’t know how to predict an earthquake. We can only see the earthquake potential based on past information that we’ve had large earthquakes in this area,” he said.

Both Gao and Allison said there is a possibility that Kansas will experience another earthquake. Prior studies suggest a magnitude six could be the largest to expect.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, earthquakes can strike the heartland without warning at anytime.

Residents of the midwest who think this part of the country is immune to earthquakes and that they only occur in California and overseas should consider:

- Residents of northwest Missouri know that earthquakes can happen anywhere. The Nemaha fault runs under Topeka, Kan., north to Lincoln, Neb., with a branch that runs under St. Joseph. Residents of rural northwest Missouri occasionally report tremors.

- Home of the New Madrid Fault where the largest earthquake in the continental United States occurred, Missouri’s Bootheel region experiences approximately 200-250 minor tremors annually. The highest earthquake risk in the United States outside the West Coast is along the New Madrid Fault. Damaging temblors are not as frequent as in California, but when they do occur, the destruction covers over more than 20 times the area because of underlying geology.

- A 3.9 magnitude earthquake struck the town of Warm Springs, Ark., Aug. 22, 2000.

- A 3.4 magnitude earthquake occurred on the Kansas-Missouri state line near Kansas City May 14, 1999.

A major quake along the New Madrid Fault would certainly have an effect in this area, according to FEMA.

“Scientists say that almost all residents of Missouri and much of the region would feel movement, from doors swinging open and dishes breaking farther from the epicenter, to slight damage to structures especially built to withstand earthquakes and destruction of most masonry and frame structures close to the earthquake site, with damage to bridges, dams, railroads and highways,” according to a February news release from FEMA.

In the event of an earthquake, one of the worst things to do is to run outside. Many injuries occur from falling debris.

“You should brace yourself in a doorway or under a heavy table or desk,” said Allison. “Or, get down against an interior wall and cover your head and neck.”

Soldiers conducting field exercises away from buildings should stay in their vehicles and get away from utility poles and trees. Gao also said that vehicles should remain clear of overpasses.

After the shaking stops, according to FEMA, check yourself and others for injuries, check water, gas and electric lines for damage, don't use matches and avoid the telephone.

Turn to battery-powered radios for lifesaving information, don't go sightseeing and expect aftershocks.

For more information, visit the FEMA website at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)