

Study: Midwest not ready for a major quake

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A Washington University professor says Midwesterners rarely think about earthquake safety so towns along the New Madrid fault are not prepared.

David Gillespie, a disaster preparedness expert at the St. Louis university, notes earthquakes are a common part of life in California, so people there consider earthquake safety an important issue and towns are prepared for major seismic events.

However, seismologists say while major earthquakes along the Midwest's New Madrid fault are rare, when one eventually occurs it could be catastrophic.

"Unfortunately earthquake safety in the Midwest is event driven -- most people will not begin to care about the risk until an earthquake happens," said Gillespie, also a professor of social work. "Town leaders need to think long-term -- 25 or 50 years out -- about incremental improvements in safety measures that can be sustained. This is a different kind of planning, but it is necessary to be ready for the eventual catastrophic quake that will strike."

Gillespie presented the paper "Dynamics of Earthquake Safety and Economic Development," Monday during the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

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