

Scientists plan 10-year quake forecasts

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A Canadian scientist says she is involved in an international effort to create 10-year earthquake forecasts for several nations.

Kristy Tiampo of the University of Western Ontario -- the earthquake hazards assessment chairwoman of Canada's Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council -- says she and colleagues hope to begin producing such 10-year earthquake forecasts within five years.

The forecasts will be used to suggest to governments which areas should shore up buildings and to determine the order of preparations.

"We now know where many potential earthquake hot spots are but the key is to direct government spending toward the areas that need attention," said Tiampo. "For the most part, we work with hazard maps predicting the next 30 to 50 years of ground shaking over a widespread area."

Tiampo says the scientists' forecast methods are adapted from an old physics technique called phase dynamics. That, she says, means the researchers calculate the number of earthquakes in a small location, such as San Francisco, and then compare it with the earthquake rate for an entire region.

"We need to pinpoint locations so we know where to provide support first," she said.

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