

Industry corruption, shoddy construction likely contributed to Haiti quake devastation

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The death toll in the massive 7.0 magnitude earthquake in Haiti Jan. 12 is expected to continue to rise in the coming days, likely in large part because of corruption and resulting shoddy construction practices in the poor Caribbean nation, according to a University of Colorado at Boulder seismologist.

The [earthquake](#) hit about 10 miles west of the capitol city of Port-au-Prince, which has about 2 million inhabitants, said Professor Roger Bilham of CU-Boulder's geological sciences department. The earthquake occurred along what is known as a "strike-slip zone" similar to the [San Andreas Fault](#) in California, where one side of a vertical fault moves past another one, he said.

"Port-au-Prince is probably one of the worst constructed cities in the world, and even the presidential palace collapsed," said Bilham. "An earthquake near a major city on one of several faults bounding the edge of the [Caribbean Plate](#) is one that many of us were expecting sooner or later."

The International Red Cross estimated today that 45,000 to 50,000 people were killed in Tuesday's massive earthquake.

Bilham said one of the chief causes of the high destruction and fatality rates in Haiti and other developing countries is due in large part to corruption in the construction industry. One of the problems is bribery, which often takes the form of corrupt awards of construction projects,

corrupt issuance of permits and approval documents and corrupt inspection practices.

"It should be appalling to the people of the world that in 2009, more than 100 years after earthquake-resistant [construction](#) began to be understood and implemented by engineers, that it is possible to forecast large numbers of future earthquake fatalities from the collapse of cities," said Bilham in his 2009 Mallet-Milne Lecture to earthquake engineers at The Society for Earthquake and Civil Engineering Dynamics meeting in London.

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder

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