

Eight earthquakes in four weeks proves old fault exists near NC mountain town, USGS says

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A North Carolina town was hit June 16 by its eighth earthquake in just over three weeks, which means there's an old fault line that's now active, the U.S. Geological Survey says.

The quake was a 2.1, centered in a sparsely populated area about 2.4 miles north of West Canton.

That's the same general area where seven previous earthquakes have been recorded since May 23, ranging from a 1.8 to a 3.2, records show.

Hundreds of witnesses have reported feeling some of the stronger quakes, but the latest had only one witness report as of midday Friday. That was filed by someone who felt weak shaking 8 miles away in the town of Clyde, the USGS says.

All the quakes originated near Chambers Mountain, north of Interstate 40.

That means there is definitely an old fault in the area, the USGS says, but experts are at a loss as to why it has suddenly become active.

They also don't know if the "cluster" will continue or come to a sudden halt.

"Earthquakes are caused when rocks under ground move. Sometimes, we have other earthquakes when those rocks come back to some kind of equilibrium," USGS officials told McClatchy News.

All eight earthquakes were shallow and minor in magnitude, but that's not to say stronger quakes aren't possible, the USGS says.

The Appalachian Mountains are not on an active tectonic plate boundary—where earthquakes are common—but the region has sporadic minor quakes linked to old fault lines, geologists say.

Those faults date back hundreds of million years—to when the Appalachians were formed—and they can occasionally become active when stress builds in spots where the rock is weak, experts say.

West Canton is about 150 miles northwest of Charlotte.

What to do in an earthquake

Earthquakes' sudden, rapid shaking can cause fires, tsunamis, landslides or avalanches. They can happen anywhere, but they're most common in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Puerto Rico and Washington, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

If an earthquake strikes, it's best to protect yourself right away.

Here are tips from experts:

- If you're in a car: Pull over and stop. Set your parking brake.
- If you're in bed: Turn face-down and cover your head with a pillow.
- If you're outdoors: Stay away from buildings. Don't go inside.
- If you're inside: Stay and don't run outdoors. Stay away from doorways.

The best way to protect yourself during an [earthquake](#) is to drop, cover and hold on, officials say.

"Wherever you are, drop down to your hands and knees and hold onto something sturdy," officials say.

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