

Jaded West Coast chuckles over East Coast quake

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In this Nov. 13, 2008 file photo, school children practice their "drop, cover and hold" technique, as they participate in the "Great Southern California Shakeout" earthquake drill, based on the hypothetical scenario of a magnitude 7.8 earthquake, at the Altadena Christian Children's Center in Altadena, Calif. The reaction to the East Coast earthquake triggered mockery from the seismically active West Coast, where similar-sized quakes happen on a regular basis and rarely become a national media obsession. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)

Soon after the lunch plates stopped rattling and books stopped thumping to the floor, shaken easterners could hear another sound from Tuesday's magnitude-5.8 quake: snickering emanating from the opposite side of the continent.

"Really all this excitement over a 5.8 [quake](#)??? Come on East Coast, we have those for breakfast out here!!!!" wrote Dennis Miller, 50, a lifelong

California resident whose house in Pleasanton sits on an earthquake fault line.

On [Twitter](#) and Facebook and over email, people circulated a photo of a table and four plastic lawn chairs in a serene garden setting. One of the chairs flipped on its back. The mock image carried the title "DC Earthquake Devastation."

All the more laughable for some were the images of people fleeing buildings - the exact opposite of what you're supposed to do in a quake.

"Hey East Coast, the entire West Coast is mocking you right now," tweeted Todd Walker, an Anchorage TV anchorman.

The tough earthquake talk comes from a coast that is apparently jaded by its own [seismic activity](#) - or perhaps not as experienced as it imagines itself to be.

Tuesday's quake was the East Coast's largest since 1944. California alone has seen 35 quakes of that size since then, and since Japan's massive 9.0 quake on March 11, that country has experienced 93 [aftershocks](#) that registered more than magnitude-6.0.

The flippancy partly disguises how serious the quakes are taken in California, Alaska and other earthquake-prone parts of the country.

Many West Coast residents are trained to dive under desks and tables when the shaking starts and there is a recognition that temblors of similar size to the one that hit Virginia have caused deaths and millions of dollars of damage here.

Despite the frequency of middling temblors, many people haven't experienced a truly earth-shaking quake. The last major metropolitan-

scale disaster was all the way back in 1994, when the magnitude-6.7 Northridge quake ravaged greater Los Angeles.

Joanne Razo, a legal assistant who lives in Washington, D.C., has lived through an earthquake in Los Angeles and said she knows that a 5.8-quake is mild by West Coast standards. But for her, the scary part was not the ground shaking but that "this area is not equipped to handle anything like this."

Andrew Lakoff, a University of Southern California anthropology and sociology professor who studies cultural responses to disasters, said West Coasters seemed to be reacting to scenes of East Coasters losing their cool over the quake. In California, where there is firsthand knowledge of what large quakes look like, something magnitude-5.9 is a relatively minor threat.

"A perverse consequence of living with the ongoing specter of catastrophe is this sense of pride," he said.

Marcus Beer, a video game critic who moved to Los Angeles in 2002 after growing up in the seismically stable British nation of Wales, said he didn't unleash his own smart-alecky tweet about the quake until he saw that it hadn't caused any major damage or harm.

He said he was amused by how much media attention was being seized by a quake of a size that - barring serious damage - would prompt little more than a few nervous chuckles on the West Coast.

"For me, it was just ironic that the major news centers being based on the East Coast finally got hit by what we consider a temblor and it's, 'Oh my God!'" Beer said. "We get those all the time, and we're so used to them."

Some East Coasters seemed to understand the eye-rolling from the [West Coast](#). On Foursquare, a service that lets people tell others where they've been, users all over the East Coast checked in to made-up locations such as "Earthquakepocalypse," just as they checked in to "Snowpocalypse" during winter storms.

Sarah Atkinson, a manager for a marketing firm in San Jose, was unimpressed by all the excitement.

"5.9? That's what us Californians use to stir our coffee with," she tweeted.

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