

State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



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State Planning Ahead for Potential Major Earthquake Along New Madrid Seismic Zone

Missouri's Adjutant General, Brigadier Gen. Steven L. Danner, and the Missouri National Guard recently sponsored a [New Madrid Seismic Zone Workshop](#) in St. Louis in which more than 200 National Guard officials and representatives from civilian agencies from eight states met to coordinate the National Guard response to a potential catastrophic earthquake in the New Madrid Seismic Zone. The workshop will become an annual event and will be hosted next year by the Arkansas National Guard.

Earthquakes are a very real and dangerous threat in many parts of the world. Just recently, a major earthquake measuring around 8.0 on the Richter scale struck near the Samoan Islands, triggering a 10-foot tsunami and a tsunami warning for the Hawaiian Islands, killing upwards of 100 people.

Here in the U.S., the highest risk of an earthquake in the mainland outside the U.S. West Coast is along the New Madrid Seismic Zone — a 150-mile fault system that stretches through much of southeast Missouri. Because of our region's unique geology, any earthquake activity occurring here has the potential of affecting much larger areas than earthquakes of similar magnitude in the western U.S.

Three of the most powerful earthquakes in U.S. history occurred in the New Madrid Seismic Zone during the winter of 1811-1812, including in New Madrid, Missouri — then a town of only 400 people. Stories continue to be told how the quake was felt as far as 1,000 miles away and rang church bells on the eastern seaboard. The largest earthquakes to have occurred since then were on Jan. 4, 1843, and Oct. 31, 1895. You may recall that Dr. Iben Browning predicted that conditions would be similar for such a catastrophic earthquake around Dec. 3, 1990. Around that time, many preparations and reactions occurred, but thankfully there was no earthquake.

The New Madrid Fault is active — averaging more than 200 measured events per year. In April 2008, a 5.4 magnitude earthquake near Mt. Carmel, IL, served as a wakeup call of the fault system's potential of producing large earthquakes. Most experts agree it's not a matter of if, but *when* a major earthquake will occur here.

According to the [United States Geological Service](#), scientists estimate that the probability of a magnitude 6 to 7 earthquake occurring in the New Madrid Seismic Zone with the next 50 years is higher than 90 percent. Missouri geology professor Dr. David J. Rogers, who spoke at the National Guard workshop, said a magnitude 6.5 or greater earthquake here would result in widespread destruction and affect millions of people. Last year, the [Federal Emergency](#)

[Management Agency](#) warned that a serious earthquake in the New Madrid Seismic Zone could result in “the highest economic losses due to a natural disaster in the United States.”

In the event such an earthquake occurs, it’s reassuring to know the [Missouri National Guard](#) and other state agencies like the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) are prepared and have taken action to educate emergency responders and southeast Missouri residents on earthquake preparedness.

Education, planning, proper building construction and preparedness are the keys to minimizing losses, deaths and injuries — with preparedness the key. We cannot prevent the coming of an earthquake — it will happen — but we can prevent it from being a major disaster.

For more information on earthquake preparedness, visit SEMA’s web site at www.sema.dps.mo.gov.

As always, if you have comments or questions about this week’s column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at 1-877-291-5584.

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