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Science News

EARTHQUAKE RISK AND ITS ABATEMENT IN CALIFORNIA

By HARRY O. WOOD
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Long experience has made it certain that the occurrence of earthquakes in and near California, and the attendant risk that there is from this cause, are matters not well understood by a vast majority of people both inside the state and beyond its borders. For the most part non-residents overestimate and residents underestimate the risk here from earth shocks. In both respects so general a want of understanding is disadvantageous to the region. From every point of view the situation calls for clarification.

Manifestly there is some risk—of death, injury and loss of property—in every actively seismic region where very small earthquakes are frequent, somewhat larger ones numerous, with the occurrence of shocks of small destructiveness every year or two on the average, and moderate, large and great earthquakes at longer and longer intervals. California is such a region. How great is this risk, and how is it spread? What can be done to abate it?

Although the following discussion necessarily deals specifically with California and the immediately neighboring region, the general conclusions reached apply also to seismic regions elsewhere, including some other districts in the United States.

1 See "Destructive and Near-destructive Earthquakes in California and Western Nevada," U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Special Publication No. 191.