

TUESDAY

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L.A. earthquake toll at 29

EARTHQUAKE

The Associated Press

Facts on yesterday's earthquake in Southern California:

• Epicenter: Northridge, 20 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles in San Fernando Valley.

• Richter scale reading: 6.6.

• Time: 4:31 a.m.

• Deaths: 29.

• Damage: Five interstates, including the state's major north-south route, and three state highways were closed at several points; major water and gas lines ruptured; major structural damage.

• Fires: Reports of 30-40 homes catching fire near Sylmar at northern end of San Fernando Valley; other fires apparently caused by natural gas pipeline ruptures.

• Other: Quake derailed freight train carrying sulfuric acid; briefly closed Los Angeles International Airport; telephone service was lost throughout region and power disrupted as far as Canada.

• Scope: Quake felt as far as San Diego, 125 miles south, and Las Vegas, 275 miles east.

INSIDE

Violent earthquake reveals presence of a "blind thrust fault" deep beneath Northridge that moved mountains closer together. Page 6A.

The information superhighway provided L.A. computer users with a means to communicate with the world when long-distance telephone service faltered. Page 6A.

Southern California's lifeline, the freeway system, is snarled in seconds. Page 7A.

Disastrous earthquake was not the Big One - not yet. Page 7A.

Hundreds of calls pour in to the Red Cross as Tucsonans try to contact relatives. Page 7A.

The tremor showed that building designers still have much to learn. Page 7A.

President Clinton declares the earthquake area "a major disaster" and sends high officials to Los Angeles. Page 7A.

The McNeill family was jolted awake by the quake, but thought their home of 17 years was OK. Then came the explosion. Page 12A.

California's string of costly disasters continues. Page 4B.



Ray Hudson recalls as a friend's mobile home goes up in flames in Sylmar, where he lost his own home in the 1971 quake.

'We're alive, that's the main thing'

Knights-Ridder Newspapers

LOS ANGELES - Yesterday's earthquake delivered another trauma to an area still reeling from last summer's fires and not recovered from the recession and the rising cost of living.

Death seemed a distinct possibility.

"This place was moving like a jackhammer was going at it," said Sherman Oaks resident Richard Goodie, 32. "Our bedroom wall tore away. I was looking at the ceiling one moment, then I was looking at the sky. I thought we were dead."

His wife, Marie Goodie, said the couple were making plans for their one-year anniversary next month. "We didn't think we would make it this morning," she said. "We said this is it... I love you."

In Hollywood, Garry Hood, 39, a visitor from Nashville, Tenn., who is more familiar with tornadoes than earthquakes, said, "It seemed like it went on for hours. You had enough time to think about dying."

Most people, even those who had lost their homes, were elated to be alive.

Take Gary and Charlotte Johnson, an older couple who live in a mobile home park in Sylmar. The quake moved mobile homes off foundations, tilting them every which way. The Johnsons got out. Then, fires flared by broken gas lines erupted, the winds flocked up and flames blanketed the park. It was chaotic.

The Johnsons, who had fled See 'ALIVE,' Page 2A

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Los Angeles hit by major earthquake

The quake was felt at 4:31 a.m. (local time) for about 30 seconds or more, and several aftershocks followed within minutes. The epicenter is believed to be in Northridge which is 20 miles west of downtown L.A. The quake has been estimated to measure 6.6 on the Richter Scale.



Man recalls the 'screaming' in apartments' rubble

© 1994 San Francisco Chronicle

NORTHRIDGE, Calif. - First Erik and Susan Pearson felt their bed fall out from under them, and then they fell 12 feet down to where their bed rested in the pile of rubble that had been their apartment at Northridge Meadows.

When they scrambled out of what had been their third-floor unit in the sprawling complex, they had to jump only about 15 feet from their balcony to the ground, because the bottom floor of the structure had been squashed out of existence by yesterday's earthquake.

At first, the couple knew only what terror they were living through at 1665 Reseda Blvd., about nine miles above the spot where the quake was centered.

"I grabbed my wife, and the whole place kept shaking, and she was screaming. I don't want to die. We're going to die. I don't want to die," recalled Erik Pearson, a 27-year-old nursing student.

To Susan Pearson, it felt as if a bomb had gone off and she had been tossed up into

the air, dropped and tossed again. Outside their apartment, they found a world of total darkness and a hell Erik Pearson will never forget.

All around him, he said, people were screaming for help. Parts of bodies stuck out from beneath the building. The stench of natural gas was everywhere. Here and there a flashlight glowed. Until someone yelled at them about the danger of a gas explosion, some people tried to use candles to find their way in the darkness.

"Everyone was screaming over and over," said the way, red-headed Pearson as he thought back to the hours immediately after the 4:31 a.m. quake.

Last night, authorities were placing the death toll at Northridge Meadows at at least 15. That number represented the largest cluster of fatalities found so far as rescuers panned through crushed homes, apartments and parking structures across the San Fernando Valley.

Pearson saw the death toll up close. Working with other rescuers in the hour be-

1 building collapse is fatal to 15

By Catherine O'Brien

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES - For an interminable 30 seconds, the earth heaved.

A three-story apartment complex collapsed into two floors, trapping body after body inside.

Concrete freeways snapped like matchsticks, turning the nation's busiest highway network into a commuter's nightmare.

Power and gas lines and water mains broke, shooting fireball-like geysers in flooded streets, consuming scores of homes and leaving thousands of displaced or just plain scared residents to sleep outdoors.

At least 29 people were killed, 15 in the apartment building, where it was feared more victims remained in the rubble.

It took 30 seconds, shorter than some earthquakes but exactly twice as long as the devastating 1989 tremor that killed 63 in San Francisco, and more jolting than any that hardened earthquake veterans in Los Angeles could remember.

Yesterday's quake hit at 4:31 a.m. PST (5:31 a.m. Tucson time), shattering the sleeping suburbs of the sprawling San Fernando Valley, 20 miles north-west of downtown Los Angeles.

It measured 6.6 on the Richter scale, was felt from San Diego 125 miles to the south to Las Vegas 275 miles to the northeast, and yet it wasn't the long-predicted, long-deadend Big One.

It could have been much worse. Freeway traffic was minimal in the predawn hours on the holiday honoring the late Martin Luther King. The only traffic fatality was a motorcycle policeman who rode off a fractured freeway as he sped to work.

By sunrise, dozens of homes had been lost to fires that broke out on cracked and flooded streets. By sunset, scores of aftershocks, including one magnitude-5.7, had left residents wary of their own homes.

The whole street was on fire. Even the tall palm trees were burning. It was a very frightening experience. We lost everything. We have nothing, but nobody was hurt. We're all safe," said Al McNeil, whose home in Granada Hills was destroyed by fire.

In just one of many rescues, searchers spent hours digging through the wreckage of a mall parking garage before extracting a maintenance worker alive.

Though the bulk of the structural damage was centered in the San Fernando Valley, power was disrupted as far away as Canada, and traffic lights were knocked out in downtown Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley.

By evening, at least 680,000 customers were still without power in Los Angeles County, and 50,000 were without water. Residents were able to obtain water from trucks at area high schools.

The city Department of Water See 'QUAKE,' Page 2A

WEATHER

Unseasonably warm.

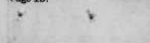
Today is expected to be sunny, breezy at times and unseasonably warm. Tonight should be clear. Look for a high today in the upper 70s and an overnight low in the lower 40s. Yesterday's high was 74, and the low was 34. Details on Page 5A.

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1980 Star photo

Former Arizona basketball coach Fred Snowden, 57, dies of an apparent heart attack while in Washington for a White House conference. Page 1D.



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