

EARTHQUAKE!!

Yes, we have no volcanoes —
but are we standing on shaky ground?

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Okay, readers, it's quiz time. How many of you have moved here recently out of "seismophobia," fear of being swallowed up by an earthquake?

Stand up and quit shaking. You've reached the promised land. The sturdy Dallas-Fort Worth area continues to score zero in the United States Geological Survey's risk ratings affecting major cities.

A zero doesn't mean a tremor can't happen here. A few old-timers (very) may remember the one that shook Rusk in 1891, or some brief jolts on the Texas-Oklahoma border in 1934. A mild earthquake rattled parts of the Panhandle this spring. The Metroplex, however, has continued to be anchored on shock absorbers and a firm foundation.

Hitting the top of the earthquake risk scale with a score of five is — you guessed it — California's San Andreas fault.

Many seismologists are rushing east these days, not necessarily to escape California's predicted plunge into the sea, but to measure ominous rumblings within a new and potentially more dangerous earthquake zone: the New Madrid fault. New Madrid poses dangers to at least four million city dwellers in five states: Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky and Tennessee. The last big upheavals in that region — in 1811 and 1812 — tossed the Mississippi River from its banks. And the next big one, scientists warn, could occur within the next half century, give or take a few years.

While scientists struggle to



perfect their earthquake prediction techniques, animals — wild and domestic — are proving to be the best seism sensors to have around the house. In recent observations, dogs, rats, mice, cattle, deer, chickens and others have sensed temblors several minutes to several hours in advance and expressed their fears with strange behaviors. Cats have carried kittens out of houses and put them in beds of soft grass, and hibernating snakes have slithered out of their dens and died in sub-freezing weather.

Researchers are not yet sure if

animals hear subsonic vibrations from stresses within the earth or if they are sensitive to electrically charged particles released by changing ground currents. Studies are still under way at a number of facilities, including the University of Texas' Marine Science Institute.

Dallas and Fort Worth do lie south of an earthquake zone stretching across Oklahoma, Kansas and part of Nebraska. "But the earthquakes there are very small," says Dr. Eugene Herrin, a professor of geological sciences at Southern Methodist University.

He has heard "rumors" of one temblor just north of Denton "in the far distant past." Yet, he says, "it could have just been the wind" shaking primitive seismic devices.

If you are still having seismophobia in the Metroplex, get yourself some pet catfish. Japanese scientists say carefully watched tanks of the fish frantically shook their barbels, their "beards," shortly before seventeen of twenty measurable quakes in a recent study. But of course, that could be just another earthshaking fish story. S

Earthquake in Ecuador — Hospitals Jammed

Guayaquil, Ecuador

A powerful earthquake shook this Pacific port city yesterday morning, crumbling old buildings and terrifying its one million inhabitants. At least eight people reportedly were killed and dozens injured.

There was no official casualty count immediately, but many houses were destroyed and hospital emergency rooms were packed with victims.

Seismologists at the U.S. Geological Survey's earthquake information center in Golden, Colo., mea-

sured the quake at 5.8 on the open-ended Richter scale, a reading that indicates a potential for severe damage.

The epicenter of the quake, which struck at 10:08 a.m., was in the Los Rios province, the astronomical observatory in the Ecuadorian capital of Quito reported.

There was no immediate word from Los Rios on damage or casualties there.

"It was an awful one, a pounding, noisy one," said Egbert T. Scott, proprietor of a bookstore in the center of Guayaquil, Ecuador's largest city. "It was like a pile driver at first and then the build-

ings began to swing."

Scott and other witnesses said people ran screaming into the streets, which were blanketed with dust. Others stopped their cars, got out and knelt on the pavement to pray.

"It felt like the earth was opening up," said Bartolome Rodriguez Bravo, a reporter for the newspaper El Telegrafo. He said the tremor interrupted electrical and communications services, and some people were trapped in elevators in high buildings.

Few buildings escaped the force of the quake. Even the best constructed were left with fissures in their walls. Balconies were knocked loose, floors collapsed inside buildings and church towers were toppled in the suburbs, witnesses said.

The worst damage occurred among homes and buildings constructed of adobe in older sections of town.

The quake was felt in Quito, in the Andes Mountains 175 miles northeast of Guayaquil, as a long, rocking motion that shook buildings but did not cause any reported injuries or serious damage.

Provincial capitals reported the quake was felt but there were no injuries or damage.

In Guayaquil, most downtown stores closed their doors until early afternoon to let their employees go home to check on their families. Public offices and schools were closed for the rest of the day.

The quake center was 300 miles south of the epicenter of a deadly quake that struck last December 12

on the Richter scale. That quake killed an estimated 600 people in northern Ecuador and Colombia and injured 20,000, the seismologists in Golden reported.

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