Quake-damaged buildings to be razed

Westmorland, Calif. — Wrecking crews were demolishing devastated commercial buildings today as residents of this Imperial Valley farming community cleaned up after a strong earthquake shook southern California yesterday. Initial damage estimates stood at $1 million in dollars but no injures.

Following Sunday's tremor, which measured 5.6 on the Richter scale, city officials ordered the demolition of 10 downtown buildings damaged beyond repair. The area had been shaken for several days by "swarm" tremors, and the move was ordered to prevent further structural collapse.

"The ground just kept shaking," said one resident of nearby Brawley. "Some people here are really scared."

"There have been a great number of smaller ones — so many that we just can't keep track. The seismograph just keeps jiggling and jiggling," said Dennis Meredith, a spokesman for the California Institute of Technology, noting that at least 49 quakes above magnitude 3.0 had rumbled since yesterday's quake, said Dennis Meredith, a spokesman for Caltech in Pasadena.

Voters for Al Qaeda building, a two-story structure at the corner of North F and West Main streets, was riddled with cracks and will be demolished, along with a vacant home next to Kerry's tavern, where the roof collapsed, Mayor Rodriguez said.

Mobile homes were knocked off their foundations, and the bell toppled from its tower at St. Joseph's Catholic Church. State 111, east of town, was being repaired in spots.

But the town's main problem was a water shortage caused when the quake ripped a hole in the water main, said the mayor of a small automobile, from the city water system, severing several pipes.

Several water trucks were brought in by the Imperial County, the City of Brawley, a private company and the California National Guard. Filling barrels was placed at street corners.

By 2:30 p.m., city crews had bypassed the filters and were pumping water trucked in from California and from private water companies.

Damage to homes ranged from minor to moderate, Rodriguez said. Six mobile homes were knocked off their foundations, but no one was damaged. Downtown, 14 commercial buildings were damaged.

Many of the structures in this community are built from red brick and adobe, or baked brick, Rodriguez said.

Repairs also were completed on irrigation canals damaged by the quake. Imperial County's paved irrigation canal, said Rodriguez. Some flooding occurred Sunday but there were no serious floods in Monday.

A two-inch-diameter crack 600 feet long was reported in state Highway 111, the other major north-south road in the area.

Quake-damaged buildings to be razed:

Westmorland a disaster area.
Mayor Ron Rodriguez said the city would file for state and federal disaster relief today, adding damages estimates could go higher.

"It's a miracle no one was hurt," Rodriguez said.

Except for demolition, he said, things were returning to normal.

Off he said the city's 6,000-gallon water tank was drained and the filtering system repaired, restored by 3:30 p.m. Thursday evening.

The city's water storage tank also was damaged and was leaking.

While crews made repairs, drinking water was trucked in from California and from private water companies.

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Earthquake damage set at $1 million

The Associated Press

WESTMORLAND, Calif. — Wrecking crews were demolishing devastated commercial buildings early this morning as residents of this Imperial Valley farming community cleaned up after a strong earthquake that caused an estimated $1 million dollars damage but no injuries.

Following Sunday's tremor, which measured 5.8 on the Richter scale, city officials ordered the demolition of 15 downtown buildings damaged beyond repair. The area had been shaken for several days by "swarms" of minor quakes, and the move was ordered to prevent further structural collapse.

"The ground just keeps shaking," said one resident of nearby Brawley. "Some jolted twice, there are really scared!"

"There have been a great number of smaller ones — so many that we just can't keep track. The seismograph just keeps jiggling and wiggling," said Dennis Meridith, a spokesman for California Institute of Technology, noting that at least 40 quakes above magnitude 3.0 had rattled the area since Friday evening.

Officials at Caltech and at the U.S. Geological Survey in Golden, Colo., said the seismic activity would probably continue.

Sunday's jolt damaged more than two-thirds of the 900 homes in Westmorland, a community of 1,000 in southeast California. Five badly damaged houses were condemned and their occupants spent the night elsewhere as city officials declared Westmorland a disaster area.

Mayor Ron Rodriguez said the city would file for state and federal disaster relief today, adding damage estimates could go higher.

"It's a miracle no one was hurt," Rodriguez said.

Except for demolition, he said, things were returning to normal.

Officials said the city's 59,000-gallon water tank was drained and the filtering system repaired, restoring all water service by late Sunday, 10 hours after the earthquake struck at 5:09 a.m. PDT.

Water was cut off when the quake twisted pipes and knocked out the town's purification system.

While crews made repairs, drinking water was brought in by the Imperial Irrigation District and from private water companies.

ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS April 27, 1981

California quake cuts off water supply in desert town

WESTMORLAND, Calif. (AP) — A strong earthquake shook this desert community Sunday, destroying at least seven buildings and damaging more than 80 others, cutting off water supplies, damaging an irrigation canal and causing a road to "just sink out of sight."

No injuries were reported.

"It's a miracle no one was hurt," Mayor Ron Rodriguez said of the quake that registered 5.6 on the Richter scale and jolted people out of their beds in this community of 1,600, about 75 miles east of San Diego.

The quakes, which struck at 5:09 a.m. PDT, caused extensive damage to this community, where many buildings are made from adobe and red brick. Adobe is damaged by even light-dried clay.

Westmorland was declared a local disaster area — clearing the way for officials to seek state and federal assistance — after Rodriguez and county officials surveyed the damage and talked to damaged owners.

"Anything with adobe in it is in trouble, and any buildings that are damaged are being condemned," Rodriguez said.

Demolition crews were busy Sunday afternoon leveling two badly damaged adobe and stucco commercial buildings that had been condemned as safety hazards.

Thirteen other commercial buildings were damaged, as were 25 percent of the town's 900 homes.

Half a dozen mobile homes were knocked off their foundations, and a bell crashed 20 feet to the ground from the steeple of St. Joseph's Church.

Five of the houses were so heavily damaged they were condemned, but officials said the residents of four of them refused to leave.

Quakes keep town jumping; damage to sewer system found

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Westmorland, Calif. — Public utility workers have been assessing newly discovered damage to this desert agricultural community's sewer system as swarms of minor quakes followed a weekend earthquake.

"We are now discovering that the quake apparently damaged our sewer plant," City Clerk Nadine Haile said Monday. "Our waste water treatment plant has problems."

A quake measuring 5.6 on the Richter scale struck this Imperial Valley town early Sunday, damaging a number of structures.

Dr. Richard Simon of the University of California at San Diego's Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics said aftershocks in the quake area continued "light and variable" on Monday.

"The swarm sequence is tapering off gradually, but we are still recording magnitudes between 2 and 3 on the average of once every half hour," Simon said.

Mayor Ron Rodriguez said the nature and extent of damage to the sewer system was unknown. Rodriguez said toilets were still functioning and that sanitation crews responded to health threats.

Imperial Irrigation District Supervisor Robert Wilson said repairs were continuing on the concrete-lined Vail Canal and that service should resume by Wednesday.

City officials said leaks in the city's 50,000-gallon water tank were being fixed today. However, water heavily laced with chlorine to fight bacteria was still being delivered to customers.

Rodriguez said the quake caused minor to moderate damage to 600 of the city's 900 homes and led to plans to raise five homes and four businesses. Four other homes and nine other commercial buildings were heavily damaged, he said.

Rodriguez also said he is seeking state and federal aid for the cleanup and to repair the damage, estimated at $1.5 million.

The Richter scale is a measure of ground motion as recorded on seismographs. Every increase of one number means a tenfold increase in magnitude. Thus, a reading of 5.5 reflects an earthquake 10 times stronger than one of 5.5.
Big Quake Slams
Imperial Valley

Homes, Roads Battered

Westmorland, Imperial County

An earthquake that registered 5.6 on the Richter scale jolted the Imperial Valley before dawn yesterday, heavily damaging buildings, roads, homes and utilities. No one was injured.

The quake was the strongest of 40 quakes of at least 3.0 intensity that have shaken Imperial, Riverside and San Diego counties and parts of western Arizona since Friday.

The quake was centered in Westmorland, a farming community of 1,600 people in the Colorado Desert 140 miles east of San Diego.

Imperial Valley residents can expect more quakes of a magnitude of 5.0 or greater over the next few days, U.S. Geological Survey officials said yesterday.

The area has historically been hit by "swarms" of earthquakes—a progressive series of jolts that can last several days—and "there's no reason to think that the swarm sequence is likely to stop," said Dr. Carl Johnson, a physicist for the U.S. Geological Survey based in Pasadena.

Mayor Ron Rodriguez declared Westmorland a disaster area after the quake, which struck at 5:09 a.m. Tuesday, knocked out the town's water supply, power and telephone systems, shook six mobile homes from their foundations, damaged about 15 businesses and more than two-thirds of the town's 800 homes, many built of adobe and red brick.

The quake also broke the Vail Irrigation Canal, which brings water from the Colorado River to local farms.

"It's a miracle no one was hurt," Rodriguez said of the quake.

The town's two-block-long Main Street was sealed off by the state Department of Transportation after cracks appeared in concrete pillars supporting the upper stories of a number of older buildings.

A bell fell 20 feet from the steeple of St. Joseph's Church; the false front of an abandoned hotel collapsed; and the Other Place, a bar, was wrecked and doomed to demolition, police said.

State Highway 111, a north-south thoroughfare, suffered a 2-inch-wide crack 600 yards long. A rural road "just sank out of sight," in the words of one observer.

Mayor Rodriguez and Imperial County officials tackled condemnation signs on a number of buildings, but some of the inhabitants refused to leave.

County officials were busy re-routing traffic and beginning cleanup operations. Red Cross and Salvation Army stations were put on alert, but they were not needed as of late yesterday, officials said.

Despite the chaos, there was no looting, and citizens quickly banded together to pick up the pieces and shelter those whose homes were destroyed, police said.

Each carrying 3000 gallons of water, had arrived from El Centro, 26 miles away, to ease Westmorland's water shortage.

The quake had knocked out the town's water purification system for 10 hours, muddying the water supply, which had to be heavily chlorinated, officials said.

The Vail Irrigation Canal, a spur of the All American Canal that brings water from the Colorado River, caused some flooding before it was repaired late yesterday.

The town of Brawley, seven miles to the southeast, was also shaken up. Employees of the Safe-way store, who were stocking shelves when the quake hit, flew under a hail of cans, jars and boxes.

"Can you imagine honey, molasses, syrup, mayonnaise and pickles all mixed together in one able?" an assistant manager said, adding that the store opened only one hour behind schedule.

The quake was felt as far south as the Mexican border town of Calexico and as far east as Arizona.

"We had a parade and celebration last night," said one police officer. "I doubt if anyone was awake to feel it."

Yesterday's temblor punctuated the largest swarm of quakes in the region since the mid-1950s, federal officials said.

In October 1979, a shock after the shock quake, the kind that leveled San Francisco in 1906, hit the Imperial Valley with an intensity of 6.8, injuring 60 people and damaging 1300 homes.

Westmorland's fire chief, 22-year-old LA. Looper, seemed to capture the spirit of the citizens in this quake-prone region, which experienced earlier swarms in 1975, 1976 and 1977.

"If I moved back East, I'd get tornadoes, hurricanes or floods. Everywhere you go, you get trouble," Looper said. "No place is perfect."

Our Correspondent
Around the Southland

Mistake Makes Ocean of Difference

By STEVE HARVEY, Times Staff Writer

Los Angeles Times April 28, 1981

Continental Drift Update. A map accompanying a story in Monday's Times about oceanographers in the Imperial Valley indicated that the big, blue body of water just west of Southern California was the Atlantic Ocean. Actually, it's the Pacific Ocean. (The terrains weren't all that earthshaking.)

For the record, the big, blue Atlantic Ocean is back East. You can see it from Atlantic City.

Inventor Richard Beck of Burbank recently advertised in Daily Variety that for a small charge, he would adjust a smoke-detector alarm to be an earthquake detector as well.

Response has been light - perhaps, because if a severe earthquake strikes, the making walls and shattering glass would be alarm enough.


WESTMORLAND 'DISASTER' PLEA MADE

San Diego Union April 28, 1981

Minor Quakes Still Jolt Site

By CLIFF SMITH

The San Diego Union

Imperial County officials moved yesterday to have the town of Westmorland declared a disaster area as minor quakes continued to jolt the area following Sunday's damaging temblor.

Major repairs to a large canal broken during the main quake were underway as public utility workers scrambled to assess what they feared may be substantial damage to the water and sewerage systems of Westmorland.

Damage to buildings in the town was surprisingly light, Westmorland Mayor Ron Rodriguez said.

"Four homes were seriously damaged and had to be condemned," Rodriguez said. "There also was minor damage to four other homes and 13 commercial buildings. In addition, six mobile homes were knocked off their stands. Most of the damage to buildings consisted only of cracked plaster, broken windows and broken items that fell from shelves.

I'm presently estimating that the total value of all the structural damage was about $1.5 million," Rodriguez said.

Carl Schwettmann, director of the county Office of Emergency Services, said the Imperial County Board of Supervisors would pass a resolution declaring Westmorland a disaster area today.

"We are hoping to get the governor to make a similar declaration," Schwettmann said. Such a declaration would make low interest loans for reconstruction available to property owners in the area.

"We are now discovering that the quake apparently damaged our sewer plant," city clerk Nadine Hale said. "Our waste water treatment plant has problems."

Rodriguez and Schwettmann said the nature and extent of the sewer damage still is unknown. Rodriguez said toilets still were functioning, however, and sanitation crews had determined no health threat to the community.

The most serious damage to the water system was to a filtration plant. Murky, unfiltered water, heavily dosed with chlorine to kill germs, was being delivered to homes yesterday as efforts to repair leaks in a 50,000-gallon water tank continued.

When the main quake struck at 6:29 a.m. Sunday with a force of 5.6 on the Richter scale of earthquake magnitude the concrete-lined Vali Canal broke in two places just east of the quake's epicenter five miles north of Westmorland.

Imperial Irrigation District supervisor Robert Wilson said water gushed through the cracks, quickly opening 59-foot-wide gaps in the canal.

"All of the water flowed into drainage ditches and down into the Alamo River," Wilson said. "No large areas of land were flooded."

Irrigation district workers soon closed dikes upstream to stop the flow, and grading repairs of the two breaks were finished yesterday. "We will be pouring concrete (today) and selling water again by Wednesday," Wilson said.

The Vali Canal runs almost due west from the Highline Canal and supplies water to about 20,000 acres of land in the Westmorland and Calipatria areas.

Carle Hatton, a seismologist at the California Institute of Technology, said the Sunday quake was the strongest in the region since a magnitude 6.1 tremor hit the Cerrito Prieto area south of Mexicali last June 5. The Sunday quake also was the strongest in Imperial Valley since a tremor of magnitute 6.8 struck on Oct. 19, 1979.

"Aftershocks in the quake area are continuing light and variable," said Richard Simons of UCSD's Institute of Geophysics and Planetary Physics.
CALIFORNIA IS EARTHQUAKE COUNTRY

Prepare for an Earthquake now!

BEFORE AN EARTHQUAKE

Have the following items ready:
- A FEW FLASHLIGHTS (WITH EXTRA BATTERIES)
- A FIRST AID KIT
- A FEW GALLONS OF WATER IN PLASTIC CONTAINERS FOR EACH FAMILY MEMBER
- FOOD (CANNED OR DRIED) TO SUPPORT FAMILY FOR AT LEAST ONE WEEK
- A PORTABLE RADIO (WITH EXTRA BATTERIES)

DURING AN EARTHQUAKE

- IF INDOORS, stay there.
  - GET UNDER DESK OR TABLE
  - STAY AWAY FROM WINDOWS AND SHELVES
- IF OUTSIDE, stay outside.
  - GET INTO THE OPEN
  - GET AWAY FROM BUILDINGS AND POWER LINES
- IF DRIVING A VEHICLE, pull over, stop and stay inside.

AFTER AN EARTHQUAKE

- Turn on your radio (portable or car) and stay inside.
- Check for injuries.
  - GIVE MOUTH-TO-MOUTH RESUSCITATION TO ANYONE WHO HAS STOPPED BREATHING.
  - APPLY DIRECT PRESSURE OVER WOUND TO STOP ANY BLEEDING INJURY.
  - DO NOT MOVE SERIOUSLY INJURED UNLESS THEY ARE IN DANGER OF FURTHER INJURY
- Check for safety.
  - CHECK FIRE HAZARDS IN HOME.
  - CHECK FOR GAS LEAKS BY SMELLING GAS GOOD.
  - DO NOT USE ELECTRICAL SWITCHES OR APPLIANCES IF GAS LEAKS ARE SUSPECTED.
- Check food and water supply.
  - IF WATER IS UNAVAILABLE, USE WATER IN WATER HEATER, OR TOILET TANK.
  - Do not use the telephone except to report medical problems, fire or crimes.
  - Stay away from beaches where seismic waves could strike.
  - Be prepared for aftershocks.

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