

## MISSISSIPPI EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

# NEWS



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**Subject: MEMA and TEMA Join CUSEC for Earthquake Awareness Week**

(Jackson, MS) - When most Americans think of earthquakes, they think of California. Actually, though, experts say one of the strongest earthquakes ever in the 48 contiguous states was centered near the Mississippi River.

That's why the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) are joining the Central United States Earthquake Consortium (CUSEC) and the Center for Earthquake Research and Information (CERI) at the University of Memphis in promoting Earthquake Awareness Week January 20-26.

"Modern-day major earthquakes in the central United States began with the great New Madrid earthquakes of 1811-1812," said CUSEC Director Jim Wilkinson, referring to a series of hundreds of quakes that included at least three between magnitudes 7.5 and 8.2. "Most people today assume that this series was the only significant event in the central U.S. Actually, since 1812, there have been at least 20 earthquakes here strong enough to damage to property and infrastructure as it exists today. Two of them were capable of causing the kind of damage observed in Northridge, California, in 1994, and Kobe, Japan, in 1995."

The strongest of the 1811-12 quakes made the Mississippi River run backwards, created Reelfoot Lake, rang church bells on the east coast and became the stuff of legend. Even among people who know the legend, though, few expect it to happen again.

"Because we haven't had a major earthquake here in over 100 years, it is understandable that many people aren't very motivated about planning for earthquakes," said Gary Patterson, Information Services Director for the Center for Earthquake Research and Information at the University of Memphis. "The irony is that the longer we go without an earthquake the closer we are to the next one."

"A 6.0 or higher earthquake on the New Madrid Fault could be felt as far south in Mississippi as Leflore County," said MEMA Director Robert Latham. "It is important that every citizen be prepared for a earthquake by having a 72 hour emergency survival kit."

"The fact is, there were three earthquakes of Kobe-potential in the central U.S. within 85 years, but none in the past 190 years," said TEMA Director John White. "That makes me very confident, unfortunately, that there will be another – and sooner rather than later."

The first post-1812 quake to approach Kobe force was January 4, 1843, near Marked Tree, Ark. With an estimated magnitude of 6.4, that earthquake was felt over much of the eastern U.S. and caused damage in both Memphis and St. Louis. Damage was not well-documented because the area was still sparsely populated.

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The second came early Halloween morning in 1895, with an estimated magnitude of 6.8 and an epicenter near the small town of Charleston, Mo. It was better documented than '43 because there were more people in the affected area. The 5:15 a.m. quake shook residents out of their beds and damaged every building in the commercial area of Charleston. At Hickman, Ky., people "...rushed into the streets, panic stricken, [and] furniture was tossed to and fro." At Cairo, Ill., many chimneys were shaken down, and the public library was damaged. In Chicago, sleepers were awakened, furniture shaken and pictures fell from the walls. In Vincennes, Ind., houses were badly shaken and "people greatly excited." Two children were knocked out of bed. In St. Louis, chimneys were destroyed and loose objects fell to the floor. Pictures were thrown from walls in Louisville. In Kansas City, Mo., objects were overturned. A new lake was formed south of Henson Lake, Mo., and spouts of water and sand were reported. Chimneys were shaken down in Memphis. Dishes were broken and pictures fell from walls as far away as Washington, D.C. The earthquake was felt along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts.

The central U.S. population was still relatively small in 1895. Today, more than 12 million people live in the region. The Northridge earthquake, magnitude 6.7, was in a populated area where people were prepared for earthquakes, yet 57 people died and an estimated \$30 billion dollars in property loss was done. The Kobe earthquake, magnitude 6.9, also occurred in a populated area, but one that was not prepared for earthquakes, and over 5,000 people died and over \$235 billion dollars in losses has been estimated.

Experts agree the preparedness level in the central U.S. is closer to Kobe than to Northridge.

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