

New program to focus on earth-shaking events

P.R.'s been hit by several large quakes before

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Do you know what do if a major earthquake hits Puerto Rico?

You should, because it is only a matter of time before one does, Mayor Héctor Luis Acevedo and a geological expert said at a Wednesday news conference to announce an earthquake preparedness program.

While many erroneously believe that

earthquakes are not likely to occur in Puerto Rico, the island is located in a high-risk area between two tectonic plates. Two to three small earthquakes are picked up by seismographs each day, showing that the area is in constant seismic activity.

In 1918, an earthquake believed to have measured about 7.5 on the Richter scale rocked the western part of Puerto Rico, killing 116 people and caused \$4 million in losses. Another earthquake, believed to have measured 8.0 or more, cracked the walls of El Morro in 1787.

"Earthquakes have occurred in Puerto Rico every 51 to 117 years. We're already 20 years past the minimum estimate," said José Milinelli Freytes, a geologist who heads the Environmental Sciences Program at the University of Puerto

Rico.

"A major earthquake could hit Puerto Rico tomorrow, or next year, or 15 or 30 years from now," Molinelli added.

An earthquake is likely to cause \$2 billion in damage in San Juan, Acevedo said. But most people have no idea what they can do to protect themselves or their homes.

To stem the potential loss of life and property, the San Juan Civil Defense will start giving presentations this month at condominiums and high-rise residential buildings around the city, said San Juan Civil Defense Director Miguel Ríos.

Twelve civil defense employees are coordinating the presentations that will include a short film and a question-and-answer session. Copies of a glossy bro-

chure that folds out to form a point point guide to earthquake preparedness will also be distributed.

So far, the city has spent \$10,000 print 40,000 brochures.

Acevedo expects that up to 120 brochures will be distributed by June. In all, the earthquake preparedness program is expected to cost \$100,000 year.

"The city has a fundamental commitment towards preparing the citizen instead of waiting for a disaster to happen first," said Acevedo, who as secretary of state in 1985 was part of a team sent to assist earthquake victims in Mexico. "And each condominium board has moral and legal responsibility towards preparing its residents to deal with earthquakes and hurricanes."