

LOCAL NEWS

3 offshore earthquakes shake west coast towns

Temblors, aftershocks felt from Aguadilla to Cabo Rojo

By KARL ROSS
Of The STAR Staff

Three offshore earthquakes struck the Mona Canyon in rapid succession early Monday morning, causing many west coast residents a rude awakening.

The epicenter of the quakes, the largest measuring 4.7 on the Richter scale, was about 20 miles north of Aguadilla, said Civil Defense Director José Nolla. But reverberations shook structures extending from that town, south to Cabo Rojo.

There were no reported injuries or property damage.

According to geologists at the Puerto Rico Seismic Network, the "main shock" occurred at 2:31 a.m., just one minute after the initial shock and four minutes before the third. The magnitude of the other three quakes could not be measured, but

geologists said they were smaller.

A geologist with the network, Christa Von Hillebrandt, said they were followed by six or seven lesser aftershocks. Residents reported feeling the earth rumble beneath their feet for up to 30 seconds, but the main shock lasted nearly 6 minutes.

The quakes, Von Hillebrandt said, took place in a "finger" of the Mona Canyon nearly five miles below sea level. That finger, which extends south toward the island, is situated between two major tectonic plates, the Caribbean and North American plates.

The plates, which rotate in opposite directions, produce quakes when they chafe against each other.

The finger marks the approximate point where the devastating earthquakes of 1867 and 1918 struck, both of which measured 7.5 on the Richter scale.

Oversized waves have been battering the North Coast for the past two days, but Von Hillebrandt said the waves were a result of climactic activity, not because of the quakes. She said such an event would have to register at least 6 on the Richter scale to trigger a tidal wave.

Network Director William

McCahn said there is little imminent threat of another quake, but said the scare should serve as a wake-up call.

"I'm not going to say another one is going to happen, but now is a good time for people to find out what they should do if a larger one happens," he said. "People should take the time to identify earthquake hazards in their homes, remove those hazards and find safety zones such as under heavy furniture."

"They should practice taking cover under the furniture and teaching their children to do the same. They should also get a list of supplies they would need [from disaster officials] because the government can't guarantee supplies of water and food if an earthquake hits."

McCahn also pointed out that the fault system along the Mona Canyon was not the same one that passes through Mayaguez, where the proposed Cogentrix-Endesa coal-fired plant is slated to be built.

McCahn had argued that the plant should not be located there because of a lesser fault system, capable of producing quakes measuring 6 to 6.5 on the Richter scale, that passes close below the planned site and poses a more direct threat.

S.J. mayor re-elected president of foundation

Acevedo lauds support given by NPP colleagues

By KARL ROSS
Of The STAR Staff

San Juan Mayor Héctor Luis Acevedo won his second election in less than a month, this time by a landslide.

In a telephone interview from the Dominican Republic, Acevedo said he was unanimously re-elected president of the Inter American Foundation of Cities, an organization composed of mayors from the United States, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Among those present were 21 mayors from Puerto Rico, many of them members of the New Progressive Party. Acevedo, a member of the Popular Democratic Party, lauded his NPP colleagues for supporting him and giving a "show of Puerto Rican unity."

The Puerto Rican delegation returns today.

Not surprisingly, Acevedo said the first order of business for his administration would be "getting acquainted with the [President-elect] Clinton administration."

The hottest topic at the organization's annual convention, said Acevedo, was stopping the proliferation of drugs. "Cities that start out as drug transshipment points later become large consumers," he said, naming his city as a prime example.

Dealing with public health crises such as AIDS and cholera was another focal point of the event, the debate over condom distribution being especially lively, the mayor said. Acevedo said the approach he favors is giving local organizations the "space" they need to address the problem in their own way, in keeping with its own ethical guidelines.

Mayors from all cities agreed the housing shortage was a "critical problem," Acevedo said. He underscored the belief that market forces have failed to produce affordable housing, and said his colleagues felt government intervention was needed to help finance such construction.

Privatization of public services was also bandied about. Acevedo said his philosophy was that privatization should be done "selectively" because, in some instances, cities cannot afford to hire private firms.

Conferees also stressed the importance of on-the-job training for public officials in areas such as accounting, planning and finance. Acevedo said such instruction is vital for the future of many Latin American countries where one-third of all inhabitants live in the city.

"The battle of this last decade to raise the quality of life is going to take place in the cities," he said.

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