

Earthquake safety plan

In response to Brenda Ortiz's letter of Feb. 17, the Seismic Network of Puerto Rico also wishes that Puerto Rico were much better prepared for a major earthquake which could indeed strike us any day. And it is because of this danger that the Seismic Network, since 1987 under the auspices of the Geology Department of the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez, has been monitoring, investigating and reporting on seismic activity in the region since 1975.

Efforts have also been made to educate people in Puerto Rico on earthquake hazards and risks and safety measures. This task, carried out by different agencies and organizations, is accomplished mainly through talks and conferences to audiences ranging from students and teachers to community, government and business leaders, and the general public.

To make this type of information even more accessible, a documentary on earthquake preparedness in Puerto Rico was recently produced. It has been shown frequently on television and can be taken out free of charge at Blockbuster Video stores.

Indeed, these orientations will only have the desired effect if those who receive them do the respective follow-up work and take the necessary precautionary measures.

And this is where many of us, who invest time and energy in orientations, get frustrated. Because despite the generalized enthusiasm to "do something" after a talk or seeing a documentary, there are very few people who even having been "educated" take the time to do earthquake drills and make their homes and workplaces earthquake safe.

Nevertheless, these individual and institutional efforts still need to be accompanied by a funded comprehensive seismic mitigation plan for Puerto Rico to investigate and disseminate information on the potential hazards and risks, legislate the necessary measures and coordinate activities between agencies, institutions and professionals in order to reduce the loss of life and property.

Only with such a plan and a committed population can we hope that the day a major earthquake occurs in Puerto Rico, the deaths and injuries and material losses will be minimal.

Christa G. von Hillebrandt-Andrade
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