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PALM SPRINGS

Fire official touts early warning system for quakes

System registers temblors seconds before they strike

Quake sensors

Is the Coachella Valley vulnerable to an earthquake? Read our complete Earthquake Preparedness guide, including developing a disaster plan, what to do during and after a quake, emergency contact numbers, and how to prepare your home. You can also view up-to-the-minute earthquake activity and learn more about quake predictions, historic temblors and area fault lines. www.thedesertsun.com/earthquake.

BY NELSY RODRIGUEZ
THE DESERT SUN

A Palm Springs fire official is pressing other valley cities to consider a system of earthquake warning devices that could buy rescue workers valuable seconds in advance of a major temblor.

Acting Palm Springs Fire Chief Blake Goetz endorsed a system that, like a dog's ability to sense a quake before humans feel it, detects the first of three waves that come during an earth-quake.

Goetz said all five Palm Springs fire stations contracted to have the systems installed after it proved effective during the 2001 Anza earthquake.

"The system worked as designed," Goetz told a meeting of the Coachella Valley Association of Governments. "Very minimal if any warning, but the lights were on, the doors were open."

The QuakeGuard Earth-quake Early Warning System electronically measures the first wave of an earth-quake, which is rarely destructive and comes about 1.7 seconds faster than the second, more destructive wave.

With the right electronics,

measuring that wave can create a one-second warning for every five miles. That means if the first wave of an earthquake measuring at least 5.0 were to pop, a fire department 50 miles away would get a 10-second warning.

And 10 seconds during an earthquake could be critical," George Dickson III, CEO of Seismic Warning Systems, Inc., the sole supplier of the system, said the head start could mean life or death during an earthquake..."I know that it is an earth-quake," he said. "It's coming, I'm in it, but I haven't felt it yet. I can put my shoes on and get out to my family."

The company, however, is first pushing for the system's use in emergency response quarters, like fire departments which are typically first on scene during disasters, and not private use.

Typical fire doors take eight to 10 seconds to automatically open, Goetz said. As a feature for the system, when the digital reader reads the first wave, houselights would flash on and the automatic door would begin rising. So 10 seconds to an emergency response team means crews could already be on board their engines, trucks or ambulances on their way that much sooner.

"It's so critical that we get our resources on the street in a timely manner," Goetz told the association.

But some listening to the presentation had concerns of valid measurements, warranties, malfunctions and costs of implementing the systems in their cities.

Each system costs around \$20,000 and Dickson suggested cities should install them in each of their fire stations.

Riverside County Fire Department/ California Department of Forestry has 19 stations within seven local cities. And Cathedral City has three of its own.

But Palm Springs, which Seismic Warning Systems Inc. said was the most vulnerable of desert cities running along the San Andreas Fault, has already installed the devices. So have other California cities such as Paso Robles, Temecula, Chino Hills and Vallejo.

Dickson said the company is also setting up systems in Japan, Mexico, Chile and Turkey.

"There are 39 earthquake prone countries in the world," Dickson said. "And we plan to get all of them."

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