

Breaking Through Language Barriers with an Urgent Call to Prepare

The San Francisco Bay Area is home to at least eight geologic faults capable of producing large, damaging earthquakes, and scientists say there is a 62 percent chance that the region will experience a magnitude 6.7 or greater quake by the year 2032. The need for earthquake awareness and readiness is urgent and ongoing in the Bay Area.

Getting preparedness messages to the public, though always challenging, is even more so in a region where for many residents English is a second language. About 1.4 million Asians and 1.2 million Latinos live in the Bay Area. Thirty percent of residents were born outside of the United States, and in 20 percent of area households there are no adults who can speak or read English well.

To confront this challenge, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—two of the agencies participating in the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP)—are partnering with other organizations in a campaign to increase earthquake awareness and readiness among the non-English-speaking communities of the Bay Area. At the heart of this campaign are two new multilingual earthquake-preparedness publications, both entitled *Protecting Your Family from Earthquakes—The Seven Steps to Earthquake Safety*.

In one of these booklets, targeted to Latinos, the content is written in both Spanish and English. The other publication, designed for Asian Americans, contains Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and English translations. Each booklet is prefaced by a letter signed by ethnic community leaders and media celebrities, urging residents to prepare. The publications explain why the Bay Area is subject to earthquakes, how large earthquakes are likely to impact area households, and practical steps that residents can take before, during, and after earthquakes to help protect their families, property, and businesses.

Ethnic media, which many non-English-speaking residents rely on for daily news and information, are critical partners in promoting and disseminating the booklets and their preparedness messages. More than 700,000 copies of the publications were distributed as inserts through 18 different ethnic newspapers during February 2007, at the start of Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations. In addition, ethnic television and radio stations have aired public service announcements about the booklets and how they can be

obtained, free of charge, at area home improvement stores and Asian supermarkets.

The public can view, download, and order copies of the booklets through the USGS Web site at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/2007/41> (Latino version) and <http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/2007/42> (Asian version). The booklets were adapted from *Putting Down Roots in Earthquake Country—Your Handbook for the San Francisco Bay Region*. USGS, FEMA, and other public and private partners issued that handbook in 2005, modeling it upon the original *Putting Down Roots* handbook developed by the Southern California Earthquake Center, a research consortium supported by the National Science Foundation (another NEHRP participating agency) and USGS. Millions of these handbooks have been distributed, including a Spanish-language version of the Southern California edition.

One million copies of the Bay Area multilingual booklets have been printed, with major funding provided by the California Earthquake Authority and Pacific Gas and Electric Company.

“Our goal is to make earthquake preparedness information easily available to all residents of the Bay Area,” said Tom Brocher, a USGS seismologist. “The new multilingual publications are designed to help our newest residents get ready.”



Other organizations that have partnered with USGS and FEMA in developing the new booklets and in supporting the ethnic outreach campaign include the American Red Cross, the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, 99 Ranch Market (a chain of Asian food stores), the Asian Pacific Fund (a Bay Area philanthropic organization), New America Media (a national collaboration of ethnic news organizations), and several Bay Area ethnic media outlets.