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New UC Research Shows Earthquake Warnings Possible

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BERKELEY -- Anyone living in an earthquake-prone region like the Bay Area may no longer have to leave everything to chance when it comes to planning for earthquakes, according to a University of California, Berkeley seismologist.

Associate Professor Richard Allen has shown he can predict "within a few seconds" of an earthquake rupture, its magnitude and likely duration in places that are tens of miles from the earthquake's epicenter, according to a prepared statement issued by U.C. Berkeley today.

Those few seconds can make all the difference in helping people protect themselves in the face of an earthquake, allowing gas and electric companies to shut down or isolate their systems and giving airports enough warning to prevent air traffic landing, said Robert Sanders, a U.C. Berkeley spokesman, in a statement.

"Once the magnitude of the quake has been estimated, computers can predict areas of serious ground shaking based on an understanding of a particular fault. Within five seconds, warnings could be sent to cities in the areas calculated to expect ground motion," said Sanders.

An early warning system developed from Allen's research could also "warn rescue and clean-up personnel of aftershocks," Sanders said.

Allen's research, which will appear in the Nov. 10 issue of the prestigious journal *Nature*, shows that information about the earliest stages of an earthquake rupture can be used to predict its final size.

A temblor's ultimate magnitude can be gauged by the relationship between the first, or primary, waves it produces and the frequency signals emitted by the temblor, according to Allen.

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Allen's research challenges earlier theories of how earthquakes develop, which assumed large and small earthquakes form the same way. Instead, he has shown, the initial rupture "is different for large and small quakes from the beginning."

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