

Facts and Fallacies

Getting The Lowdown On Natural Disasters

(NAPSA)—If you're concerned that some of your knowledge about earthquakes and other natural hazards may be a bit shaky, this quiz will help to get you back on solid ground.

- True or False? More large earthquakes are occurring worldwide than ever before.

False. On average, the number of earthquakes of magnitude 7.0 or greater has remained constant throughout the last 100 years—about 19 per year.

What has changed is the speed at which the public learns about them and their economic and social impact. Increased population and development has increased the chances of an earthquake exacting a heavy toll on lives and property.

- True or False? Each year earthquakes cause more damage than any other natural disaster.

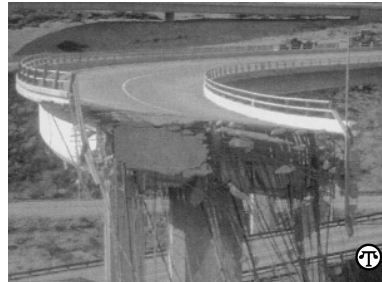
False. Individually, catastrophic earthquakes are the most costly natural hazard. But because floods occur much more frequently, their average annual cost—in both lives and property—is greater.

- True or False? Scientists can predict an earthquake.

False. At present, scientists still cannot predict with certainty when an earthquake will occur. Current research is focused more on where earthquakes are likely to take place and what their economic and social impact is likely to be.

However, scientists continue to study the physical processes that cause earthquakes in the hope that someday predicting earthquakes will be as routine as predicting the weather.

One part of the federal government is actively involved in trying to learn as much as it can about earthquakes and other natural disasters and share that information with the public.



Many feel science is the key to stopping natural hazards from becoming natural disasters.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), the key to limiting the effects of natural hazards on society is to understand the processes that cause the events so that individuals, businesses and governments can make appropriate adjustments to live safely on the land.

The USGS works to reduce the country's vulnerability to natural disasters in three ways.

The first is mapping the geographic distribution and severity of hazards and studying their underlying physical processes, which are an essential part of how the earth works.

The second is monitoring hazards to provide real time warnings and create long term records. The records are used to create models and test theories.

The third is providing information to people who respond to disasters so they can make better decisions before, during and after a disaster.

They also provide information to the private sector so it can prepare effectively for the hazards it faces. Lastly, the USGS provides information to individuals that can help protect their lives and property.

Natural hazards don't have to turn into natural disasters. To learn more, visit <http://ask.usgs.gov>.

Note to Editor: This article is part of an awareness series for Earth Science Week, October 7-13, 2001, sponsored by the American Geological Institute, a partner of the USGS. However, this article is evergreen and can be used anytime.