

The Northridge, CA, Earthquake 20 Years After: Facts, Figures and Perspectives

January 10, 2014
Northridge at 20



Damaged portion of the Golden State Freeway at Gavin Canyon, January 17, 1994.

Source: FEMA/Wikipedia

Affecting much of southern California, the Northridge, California, earthquake of January 17, 1994 was the costliest earthquake in U.S. history in terms of insured losses (both actual and adjusted for inflation). The event, which triggered the fastest ground acceleration rates (intensity of shaking) ever recorded up to that time, caused 57 fatalities, approximately 8,800 injuries, and more than \$20 billion dollars in property losses (2013 USD) to buildings and public infrastructure.

As 20 years have passed since the Northridge earthquake, numerous advances have changed how we deal with seismic activity in developed areas. Advances in civil and structural engineering, as well as emergency preparedness and rescue efforts have helped to mitigate the human toll of earthquakes. More effective communications, and widespread use of digital media and the Internet in particular, have fostered greater awareness of earthquake safety, and have changed how people share and consume information before, during and after catastrophes. Yet, in spite of these advances (or maybe because of them), fewer than 10 percent of California property and business owners today opt to purchase earthquake insurance coverage.

On the anniversary of the Northridge earthquake, the Insurance Information Institute offers resources, facts and statistics on earthquakes and insurance.

THE TEN MOST COSTLY WORLD EARTHQUAKES AND TSUNAMIS BY INSURED LOSSES, 1980-2013 (1)

(\$ millions)

Rank	Date	Location	Losses when occurred	
			Overall	Ins (2)
1	Mar. 11, 2011	Japan: Honshu, Aomori, Tohoku; Miyagi, Sendai; Fukushima, Mito; Ibaraki; Tochigi, Utsunomiya. Includes tsunami.	\$210,000	\$4
2	Jan. 17, 1994	USA: CA: Northridge, Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley, Ventura, Orange	44,000	1
3	Feb. 22, 2011	New Zealand: South Island, Canterbury, Christchurch, Lyttelton	20,000	1
4	Feb. 27, 2010	Chile: Bio Bio, Concepcion, Talcahuano, Coronel, Dichato, Chillan; Del Maule, Talca, Curico. Includes tsunami.	30,000	
5	Sep. 4, 2010	New Zealand: Canterbury, Christchurch, Avonside, Omihi, Timaru, Kaiapoi, Lyttelton	7,400	
6	Jan. 17, 1995	Japan: Prefecture Hyogo, Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto	100,000	
7	Jun. 13, 2011	New Zealand: Canterbury, Christchurch, Lyttelton	2,500	
8	May 5 and May 29, 2012	Italy: Emilia-Romagna, San Felice del Panaro, Cavezzo, Rovereto di Novi, Carpi, Concordia, Bologna. Multiple earthquakes.	16,000	
9	Dec. 26, 2004	Sri Lanka; Indonesia; Thailand; India; Bangladesh; Myanmar; Maldives; Malaysia. Multiple earthquakes, includes tsunami.	10,000	
10	Oct. 17, 1989	USA: CA: Loma Prieta, Santa Cruz, San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Silicon Valley	10,000	

(1) As of February 2014. Ranked on insured losses when occurred.

(2) Based on property losses including, if applicable, agricultural, offshore, marine, aviation and National Flood Insurance Program losses in the United States and may differ from data shown elsewhere.

NA=Data not available.

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- [Catastrophes: Insurance Issues \[3\]](#)
- [White Paper: California Earthquake Authority \[4\]](#)

Facts and Statistics

- [Earthquakes and Tsunamis](#) [5]
- [Catastrophes: U.S.](#) [6]

Video

- [Protecting Your Home from an Earthquake](#) [7]

Articles

- [Preparing for an Earthquake](#) [8]
- [In Case of an Earthquake](#) [9]
- [Recovering from an Earthquake](#) [10]
- [The San Francisco Earthquake of 1906: An Insurance Perspective](#) [11]

Apps

- I.I.I. Apps and Software

The [I.I.I. Toolkit](#) [12] is a handy, free app suite that puts everything you need to plan, prepare, respond, and restore in the palm of your hand.

Outside Resources

- [IBHS: Earthquake](#) [13]
- [Northridge 20 Symposium](#) [14]
- [?Reaching New Heights? 20th Anniversary Northridge Earthquake Conference and Workshops, California State University, Northridge](#) [15]

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.iii.org/table-archive/21447>
- [2] http://www.iii.org/issue_updates/eathquakes-risk-and-insuance-issues.html
- [3] http://www.iii.org/issues_updates/catastrophes-insurance-issues.html
- [4] http://www.iii.org/white_papers/california-earthquake-authority.html
- [5] http://www.iii.org/facts_statistics/earthquakes-and-tsunamis.html
- [6] http://www.iii.org/facts_statistics/catastrophes-us.html
- [7] <http://www.iii.org/video/protect-your-home-against-an-earthquake.html>
- [8] <http://www.iii.org/articles/preparing-for-an-earthquake>
- [9] <http://www.iii.org/articles/in-case-of-an-earthquake.html>

- [10] <http://www.iii.org/articles/recovering-from-an-earthquake.html>
- [11] <http://www.iii.org/media/research/sfearthquake100>
- [12] <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/iii-toolkit/id648015120>
- [13] <http://www.disastersafety.org/earthquake/>
- [14] <http://www.northridge20.org/>
- [15] <http://www.thevalley.net/event/valley-of-the-stars-reaching-new-heights>