

A T. REX NAMED SUE the SAM NOBLE OKLAHOMA MUSEUM of NATURAL HISTORY
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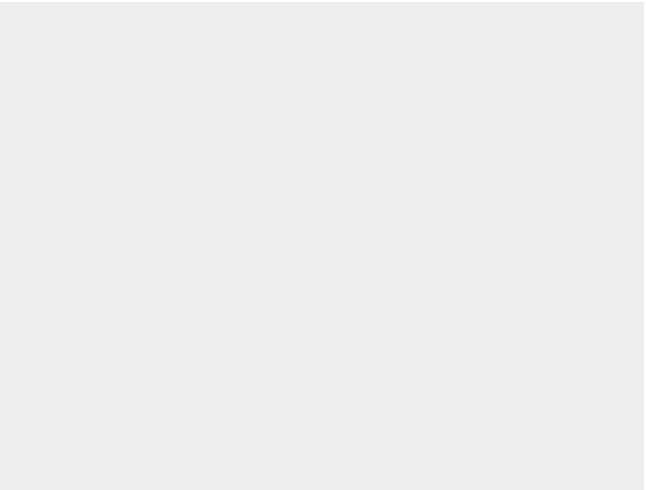
Published July 06, 2006 01:37 am - There will be a major earthquake — or perhaps even a series of them — at some point in the next 50 years in the New Madrid Fault, which touches four states in the Bootheel area of Missouri.

In our view: Earthquake scenarios

There will be a major earthquake — or perhaps even a series of them — at some point in the next 50 years in the New Madrid Fault, which touches four states in the Bootheel area of Missouri. The destructive power unleashed by a quake, say, of the magnitude of those recorded in 1811-1812, which made the Mississippi River run backward and changed the topography of the entire region, simply is mind-boggling. St. Louis might be devastated. And we have often wondered how such heavy trembling of the earth on the other side of the state affected this corner of Southwest Missouri honeycombed by abandoned mines.

The violence of a magnitude 8.0 earthquake could be felt for many hundreds of miles. Indeed, the quakes in 1811-1812 had church bells pealing in Philadelphia and beyond.

There are 219 insurance companies offering earthquake insurance in Missouri, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch,






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and many seem to be losing interest in the risks involved with those policies. Of course, only the most modern of buildings could withstand a significant seismic occurrence, and a major earthquake might rival the destruction reaped last year by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast, and what Hurricane Andrew did to Florida in 1992.

Will insurance companies continue to offer earthquake insurance as the clock ticks away on the predicted 50-year window for a major quake in the New Madrid Fault? Insurance companies are businesses. They assess their insurance risks and decide on whether they are acceptable. If earthquake coverage dries up or gets too expensive for insurers, where will property owners find relief in a catastrophe? The answer, at least for some, is government, either through some insurance program or mandated coverage by insurance companies.

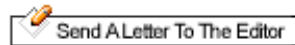
We're not convinced that Missourians would agree to having their homeowner policies and business insurance go up in order to ensure that property owners within the region where the "big one" is expected can afford coverage. It certainly would seem logical to ask them.

In the meantime, we have heard no ominous warnings for this part of the state should there be a duplication of the 1811-1812 earthquakes. But this area's heritage includes many abandoned mines with considerable amounts of water. One can only wonder what sort of destructive energy might be released if the underground water begins to slosh around and erode away the walls of containment. Maybe it could never happen. But the U.S. Geological Survey seems certain that a large quake could occur within the next five decades. It might be tomorrow, next year or in 2050.

There is no exact timetable. But the risk, however it is diced, is real.



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