

We are having a real... Oh my God, we are having an earthquake...

The 6.8 quake struck at 10:54 this morning. The Nisqually earthquake occurred in 2001. I was over at Headquarters fire station 10, it's an old classic building that has a lot of character, but of course it wasn't designed to withstand earthquakes. The worst damage was within two blocks of my office and I am looking at crumbling buildings, saw cars over-crashed. Luckily injuries were very minor on that earthquake, but we keep getting these wake up calls. People were very concerned with our public buildings. Were the firefighters going to be able to get out? Will they have issues with their equipment? The voters elected to put money towards all 32 firefighter stations. They're going back again and upping the standards because they have learned more with technology and just how earthquakes offend structures. Every time we have an earthquake, we are updating our codes. What you are seeing behind me is all the work necessary to meet a modern code to be ready for the next big one. Old structures, a lot of the masonry structures are the most vulnerable. [Newsman shouting: building four stories tall collapsed because of the earthquake]. You see in pictures a lot of times data is falling down, which is the floor or the ceiling. We are doing a lot of raising to make those connections strong. There is a lot of stilts being added, we got new beams and new columns coming in. The seal that was in here before was a little bit too small to meet the current code, so the both sides are sealed to make sure that doors will be operational and the firefighters can get out. You never know when the next one is coming. It's our job to make sure that we are ready, because the next one may be bigger.

The City of Napa is prone to disasters. Earthquakes can happen, you never know when. We've been through two pretty harsh ones and firefighters are there. We started 20 years ago and we got real serious. It took a little while to develop the plan, but we started the retrofit. In this station, as you see around the station, there are some metals plates that tied the roof into the walls to ensure that in the event of a rocking motion they would stay intact.

The morning of the earthquake I was waking up, as most of us were, to a lot of shaking, a lot of breaking glass. We started responding to the 2,000 calls that have been called in and we were in a disaster mode. I remember everything shaking. This loud noise and I started making my way to the door and the chimney collapsed on me. I think I might be paralyzed because I couldn't feel my legs. He was in quite a bit of pain when we got up there. When the first responders got there, I felt some sense of relief, the firemen were here, ambulances were here. I am going to the hospital; I'm going to be okay.

The station we are in today, Station 1, was just earthquake retrofitted right before the earthquake. Had it not been, it is very likely all the apparatus in here would've been damaged and been out of service and we wouldn't have been able to respond. I am standing right on the San Andreas Fault, the infamous San Andreas Fault, the Big One. If it happens, we are going to be cut off from everybody on that side. This ward is going to start right here, we are going to have a beach front property. On top of our normal duties out here, we were asked to participate in a QuakeSmart Mitigation Inspection Program. You got a lot of weight on the top and that thing could... once it starts rocking. Here is the list we will go through.

We are looking at water heaters, sprinklers. Is the piping secured? Water heaters, are they restrained properly? If a water heater falls over, we end up with a gas leak in the building. Simple gas leaks are going to be huge in an earthquake. All it takes is maybe five dollars' worth of materials to secure that to the wall. Looks like you are well on your way. You are able to do this with some 2x4s, some light bulbs, it probably costs less than 40 bucks to do it.

Giving them good information to make their business or organizations a safer place to be in a disaster, and all they have to do is just take that and make it happen. Thanks for stopping by. Thanks for working on it.

Earthquakes can occur any time. You don't see it coming. It literally shakes your world. It's critical to take care of each station. If the engines are stuck, buried in concrete. If a station is not accounted for, that's a whole team that's gonna take another loop. If you can't take your resources on to the street, then you can't do your job.