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B.C. not prepared for major quake, says report

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British Columbia may not be prepared for a catastrophic earthquake, but the District of North Vancouver is doing what it can to get ready for the big one.

A recent auditor general's report revealed Emergency Management BC has made no significant progress in 17 years, which was the last time the auditor general's office concluded the province's earthquake preparedness was lacking.

The report doesn't add to the strain faced by the District of North Vancouver, according to public safety section manager Fiona Dercole.

"I feel like the pressure is always there," Dercole said. "We're always the first level of government to answer to the people who live in our municipality."

The district is currently working with UBC's earthquake engineering program and Natural Resources Canada to examine seismic risks in the district. The report is tentatively scheduled to be released in June.

There is a 12 per cent probability of a catastrophic earthquake affecting B.C. within the next 50 years, according to the auditor general. If it hits near North Vancouver, the municipality could face landslides as well as liquefaction - a weakening of the soil that can lead to sinkholes in extreme cases.

When implementing town centre plans, the report can help the district take into account whether the area is a potential liquefaction area.

The major message of the auditor general's report is the need for people and businesses to be prepared, according to Dercole. "Resources will be stretched to their maximum and there won't be enough for everyone," she said.

Because there have been no major earthquakes affecting the North Shore in recent memory, residents suffer from apathy, according to Mike Andrews, planning officer for the North Shore Emergency Management Office. "People think that the government

will save everybody," he said, explaining that an abundance of displaced people may overwhelm government resources. "Truth is, we could have a damaging earthquake every few decades," he said. "We're in the return cycle for a very large one and we're overdue for a damaging one."

People should draft a plan that accounts for where family members might be at different times of the day. Andrews also recommends storing bottled water rather than trying to purify water following a disaster.

"If you're prepared for a camping trip, you're on your way to being prepared for an earthquake," he said.

As a former regional manager for the provincial emergency program, Andrews recognized the task faced by EMBC as emergency preparedness evolves and demographics shift.

"It's a monumental undertaking to dot all the i's and cross all the t's," he said. "I think that we're on the right track, I just think that a lot needs to be done."

"Critical gaps" in response plans, training and public education have left British Columbians facing a significant risk if a catastrophic earthquake occurs, according to auditor general Russ Jones.

Those gaps are largely attributed to the provincial government and EMBC not making earthquake preparedness a priority, he said. Because many EMBC staff members are focused on floods, fires and avalanches, earthquake preparedness has become a "side of desk activity," according to Jones.

A major earthquake could result in a \$75 billion hit to B.C.'s economy, according to figures from the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

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