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Richmond Times-Dispatch

Wednesday, August 24, 2011

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Rattled

Magnitude-5.8 earthquake shakes central Virginia

Few injuries and little major structural damage are reported

BY MICHAEL MARTZ
AND JOE MACENKA
Richmond Times-Dispatch

One of the most powerful earthquakes in Virginia history rippled from its epicenter in Louisa County throughout the eastern United States but injured few people and caused little major structural damage.

The 15-second tremor measured 5.8 on the Richter scale Tuesday at 1:51 p.m., prompting buildings to empty, cellphone service to go silent and two nuclear reactors near the center of the quake to shut down without damage.

Six students and at least one staff member at Louisa County High School were injured in the quake, but only one was hospitalized.

"The very good news is that the damage and the injuries that have been reported are very, very minor," Gov. Bob McDonnell said in a news conference Tuesday afternoon.

In downtown Richmond, three elderly residents of Fay Towers, a high-rise apartment building were hospitalized for medical conditions and a dozen more examined at the scene after they were evacuated, but no one was injured. The 200 residents were allowed to return to their apartments last night.

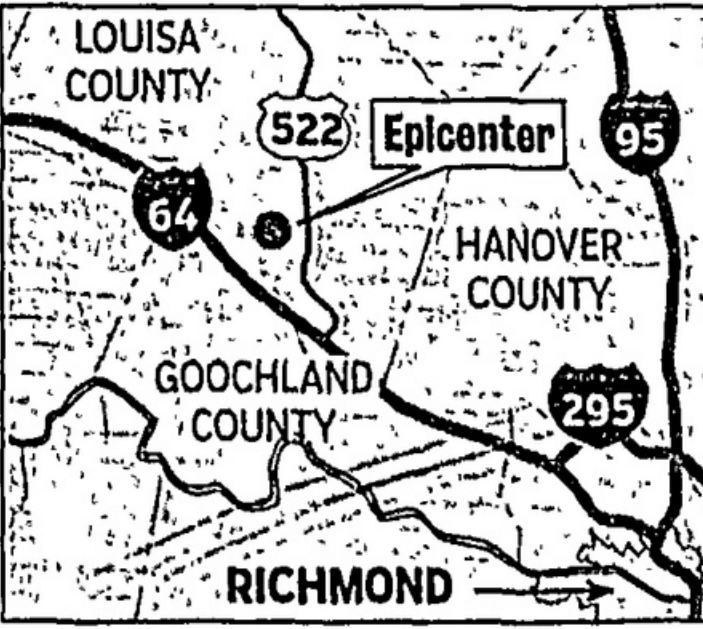
A local emergency was declared in Louisa, where the quake began almost 5 miles from the town of Mineral, and where property damage was most pronounced.

"That was quite a jolt," said

QUAKE, Page A6

Virginia jolt

The 5.8-magnitude earthquake at 1:51 p.m. Tuesday was centered in Louisa County, 36 miles northwest of Richmond.



JOHN G. OWENBY/TIMES-DISPATCH



ALEXA WELCH EDLUND/TIMES-DISPATCH

School Board member Brian Huffman walks the halls surveying the damage to Louisa County High School after the quake in Mineral. A teacher and several students suffered minor injuries as ceiling tiles, lights and bookshelves fell.

In Louisa, walls are cracked, chimneys toppled, schools shut

BY WESLEY P. HESTER
Richmond Times-Dispatch

MINERAL — Deborah Pettit, the superintendent of schools here at the epicenter of Tuesday's earthquake, was visiting a Spanish class at Louisa County High School when it hit.

"The teacher was getting

ready to say something, and all of a sudden, you hear this rumble," Pettit recalled shortly after the tremor. "When it continued and turned into a deep rumbling, I just didn't know. I thought, 'Is it a bomb?'"

The magnitude-5.8 earthquake cracked the school's walls, brought down ceiling tiles and lights and toppled bookshelves, one falling on a teacher. That teacher and about six students suffered minor injuries, Pettit said. One

Damage assessment
Watch an interview with the Louisa school superintendent assessing damage. TimesDispatch.com, search: video.

was taken to University of Virginia Medical Center for treatment; nurses treated the others at the scene.

Because of the damage there and at the nearby middle school, all Louisa County classes are canceled today as

the damage is assessed.

Homes and other structures throughout the county suffered major damage. Two homes collapsed, one of which was abandoned, and the town halls in Mineral and Louisa suffered partial roof collapses. No significant injuries were reported in the county.

A historic federal-style plantation home built in 1819 known as Cuckoo was badly

LOUISA, Page A7

Nuclear reactors at North Anna plant shut down automatically

BY PETER BACQUÉ
Richmond Times-Dispatch

Dominion Virginia Power's two North Anna nuclear reactors shut down automatically as a result of Tuesday's earthquake, according to the company.

The plant's safety systems were operating normally, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission said in a statement.

"There was a loss of power from the switchyard to the power station," Dominion Virginia Power spokesman Jim Norvelle said. "This led to an

automatic shutdown of the turbine generator, which automatically causes the reactor to shut down."

Though the North Anna plant lost off-site electric power, Norvelle said, the plant's four backup diesel generators started as designed and continued to run the reactors' cooling systems.

After the plant's four emergency diesel generators started, plant operators discovered that one of the engines had a coolant leak and shut that generator down, the company said.

The operators then started the plant's fifth generator, which is used as a spare. The plant is required to have only three generators available

REACTORS, Page A6

More inside

Callers jammed phone lines across the country. **Page A5**

200 elderly apartment residents near downtown evacuated. **Page A5**

News of the quake was main topic on the street. **Page A6**

Strongest quake in four decades hit Colorado on Monday. **Page A7**

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