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EARTHQUAKES

There are thousands of earthquakes each year. Most are small, but about 1 in 500 causes damage. Some quakes are incredibly powerful and destructive.

WHAT CAUSES EARTHQUAKES?



To understand earthquakes, imagine Earth as an egg with a cracked shell. The cracked outer layer (the eggshell) is called the lithosphere, and it is divided into huge pieces called plates (see map). The plates are constantly moving away from, toward, or past one another. Earthquakes result when plates collide or scrape against each other. The cracks in the lithosphere are called faults. Many quakes occur along these fault lines.

CALIFORNIA'S SAN ANDREAS FAULT

Perhaps the most famous fault in the world, the San Andreas fault runs for about 700 miles north-south through California. Along this fault, which is about 10 miles deep, the North American and Pacific Ocean plates are scraping past each other. In some parts of California, a crack in the ground can be seen where the fault is located. The San Andreas fault is responsible for some of the worst earthquakes in U.S. history, including the 1906 quake in San Francisco that caused more than 3,000 deaths and destroyed large parts of the city.





OTHER MAJOR

DISASTERS

DISASTERS

SHIP DISASTERS

Date	Location	What Happened?	Deaths
April 14, 1912	near Newfoundland	Luxury liner Titanic collided with iceberg.	1,503
May 7, 1915	Atlantic Ocean, near Ireland	British steamer Lusitania torpedoed and sunk by German submarine.	1,198
Jan. 30, 1945	Baltic Sea	Liner Wilhelm Gustloff carrying German refugees and soldiers sunk by Soviet sub. Highest death toll for a single ship.	9,000

AIRCRAFT DISASTERS

Date	Location	What Happened?	Deaths
May 6, 1937	Lakehurst, NJ	German zeppelin (blimp) Hindenburg caught fire as it prepared to land.	36
March 27, 1977	Tenerife, Canary Islands	Two Boeing 747s collide on the runway of Los Rodeos airport.	583
Sept. 11, 2001	New York, NY; Arlington, VA; Shanksville, PA	Two hijacked planes crashed into the World Trade Center, one plane hit the Pentagon, and a fourth went down in a PA field.	Nearly 3,000

EXPLOSIONS AND FIRES

Date	Location	What Happened?	Deaths
March 25, 1911	New York, NY	Triangle Shirtwaist Factory caught fire, trapping garment workers, mostly women.	146
Nov. 28, 1942	Boston, MA	Fire swept through the Cocoanut Grove nightclub; patrons panicked. Deadliest nightclub fire in U.S. history.	492
Dec. 3, 1984	Bhopal, India	A pesticide factory explosion spread toxic gas. Worst industrial accident in history.	15,000
April 17, 2013	West, TX	A fire and explosion at a fertilizer plant caused hundreds of casualties and destroyed a large part of the town.	15

FLOODS

Date	Location	What Happened?	Deaths
1927	Mississippi River	From Illinois to Louisiana, the Mississippi River overflowed its banks, flooding 16 million acres of land and leaving 600,000 people homeless. Most destructive river flood in U.S. history.	246+
Aug. 1931	China	Vast flooding on the Huang He River. Highest known death toll from a flood.	3,700,000