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CALIFORNIA GEOLOGICAL SURVEY ISSUES PRELIMINARY EARTHQUAKE FAULT ZONE MAPS FOR L.A.

SACRAMENTO – The California Geological Survey (CGS) today issued preliminary versions of two regulatory maps to aid in land-use planning in the greater Los Angeles area. These Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone Maps outline zones of required site investigations along the Hollywood Fault as well as additional active faults in the Monrovia-Duarte-Azusa area. They are used when new structures for human occupancy are located within the zones.

“The Alquist-Priolo Act prohibits the construction of certain structures for human occupancy across the surface traces of active faults,” said Dr. John Parrish, State Geologist of California and head of CGS. “There has been a great deal of concern in the Hollywood area that portions of a major new construction site may overlie traces of the Hollywood Fault.”

Of the various hazards associated with major earthquakes – including shaking, landslides and liquefaction -- building atop the surface trace of an active fault is the easiest to avoid. The Alquist-Priolo Act was passed into law following the destructive February 9, 1971 magnitude 6.6 San Fernando Earthquake, which caused extensive surface ruptures that damaged numerous buildings. Currently there are 553 official maps affecting 36 counties and more than 100 communities.

Many surface faults in the Los Angeles Basin are already zoned. CGS did not previously create a zone for the Hollywood Fault for two reasons: first, budgetary limitations and second, the existence of a special zone established by the city. However, research of the area over the past 15 years has provided better information on the Hollywood Fault's location and geologically recent activity, prompting the CGS research that led to the new map.

On July 20, 2013, CGS notified the Los Angeles City Council of its intention to zone the Hollywood Fault. At the time, the Council and city Planning Commission were reviewing plans for the Millennium Hollywood Project – one million square feet of office, residential, hotel and retail space, including 39- and

35-story towers near the landmark Capitol Records building.

“We had planned to review the Hollywood Fault for zoning purposes in 2014 but pushed up our timetable to provide the city with the most current information available,” Parrish said. “It stands to reason that where an earthquake fault has ruptured the land surface in the past, it will do so again in a future large earthquake. It’s nearly impossible to avoid building near an earthquake fault in the Los Angeles area, but making sure the footprint of buildings isn’t directly atop those surface faults can save lives, property, and money.”

Also released was a preliminary map with zones along portions of the Sierra Madre, Raymond, Clamshell Canyon, Duarte and related faults in a number of neighboring communities north of the 210 freeway. Local landmarks all or partially within the zones include Charles H. Lee Elementary School in Azusa and Citrus College in Glendora.

Preliminary maps have been forwarded to the City and County of Los Angeles and other local lead agencies and will be available for public review. The review period, which includes a hearing in front of the State Mining and Geology Board, will be for a minimum of 90 days. CGS will publish final maps after it considers comments from the lead agencies, the public, and the State Mining and Geology Board.

Under the Alquist-Priolo Act, before a new project can be permitted within a zone, lead agencies must require a geologic investigation to demonstrate that proposed buildings will not be constructed across active faults. An evaluation and written report of a specific site must be prepared by a California-licensed geologist. Disclosure that property is within a zone must be made in real estate transactions; otherwise, the zones do not affect existing developments unless extensive additions or remodeling are proposed.

Paper copies of Earthquake Fault Zone maps can be viewed at the Los Angeles County Planning Department or at CGS offices, located in Sacramento, Menlo Park and Los Angeles.

There have been 26 earthquakes associated with surface faulting in California since the first Alquist-Priolo zone maps were issued in 1974. Although most of the ground surface displacement associated with these events was relatively minor, there have been seven earthquakes with surface fault offsets greater than a foot. Earlier earthquake records suggest that earthquakes with ground surface displacement equal to or greater than three feet occur once every 15 to 20 years in California.

“Not all earthquakes are associated with surface fault rupture,” noted CGS Supervising Engineering Geologist Tim McCrink, who heads the Alquist-Priolo program. “The 1994 Northridge earthquake caused major damage in the Los Angeles region, but it was caused by a ‘blind thrust’ fault that did not reach the ground surface. But the 1992 Landers Earthquake in San Bernardino County extended 50 miles with surface displacements up to 20 feet. We can’t do anything to stop earthquakes, but creating the Earthquake Fault Zones and avoiding building directly atop fault traces is something we can do.”

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