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News

Aging East Coast infrastructure a concern after quake

Some gas lines in New York City date back to the Civil War

By Lucas Mearian
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Computerworld - The earthquake that shook the East Coast on Tuesday had disaster recovery experts more concerned about how an aging infrastructure could be affected than they were about how large corporations have prepared their business continuity plans.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the earthquake, which struck shortly before 2 p.m. Eastern time, measured 5.9 on the Richter scale and was centered 83 miles southwest of Washington.

The earthquake precedes Hurricane Irene, which is moving through the Caribbean and is on track to hit the U.S. Eastern seaboard from South Carolina to New England. The storm is currently categorized as a Class 2 hurricane with 100 mph winds.

When the quake struck today, buildings throughout major cities around the epicenter were evacuated, with thousands streaming onto the streets of the nation's capital. Areas as far north as New Hampshire and as far south as North Carolina also reported building evacuations, along with some minor infrastructure damage.

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In Manhattan, New York City Hall was evacuated shortly before 2 p.m., and in South Boston hundreds were ushered out of a U.S. District Court.

Al Berman, executive director of the Disaster Recovery Institute International (DRI) in Manhattan, said his first thoughts were of aging infrastructure throughout the Northeast.

"We saw some telephone lines go down. Fortunately, we didn't see gas lines go down because, just like in Japan, it's infrastructure that causes the most problems," he said. "It's especially an issue in the Northeast. There are pipes in New York City that date back to the Civil War."

SunGard, a major provider of disaster recovery and business continuity services, said 12 of its availability services facilities in the Northeast were in the earthquake zone. "At this time, all systems are working normally, and we have no reports or

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indications of any power outages in any of our data centers or workforce recovery centers. SunGard Availability Services remains on high alert," said SunGard Availability Services spokesperson Marifran Manzo-Ritchie.

Berman said that most large corporations have learned lessons from previous calamities; they know that they should make sure their disaster recovery plans are in order and that systems are tested regularly. However, small and midsize businesses (SMB) may not be as well prepared.

DRI is a nonprofit organization that provides educational services and certification for contingency planning and business continuity professionals. Berman said he just returned from a trip to Japan where he surveyed the damage caused by the magnitude 8.8 earthquake that struck on March 11, and the devastating tsunami that followed. The disaster severely damaged nuclear power plants and destroyed elements of the country's infrastructure, causing major disruptions in supply chains that are still being felt.

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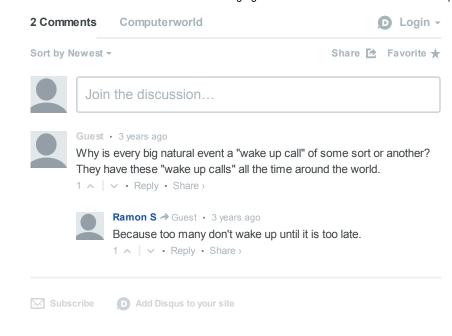
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