

Engineers: Panama City felt only a fraction of the 9 October quake; Pedro Miguel fault is the real risk

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Summary

Casa Solution summarises engineering analysis of the magnitude 7.7 earthquake of 9 October near Pitaloza Arriba, Herrera. Panama City recorded only 0.08-0.10g of ground acceleration against 0.57-0.60g near the epicentre, and experts warn the nearby Pedro Miguel fault would be a far harder test.

Details (summary of the article)

Casa Solution reports on what structural engineers have concluded about the 9 October earthquake, which struck at 12:56 p.m. near Pitaloza Arriba in Herrera at about 10 km depth, measured at magnitude 7.7 by the USGS and 7.5 by Sinaproc, followed by hundreds of aftershocks including one above magnitude 6. Readings from the Universidad Tecnológica de Panamá accelerograph network showed 0.57-0.60g in Azuero and Veraguas, 0.24g in Penonomé and only 0.08-0.10g in Panama City, where 85-90% of the seismic energy had dissipated. The capital's towers held because of distance, rock foundations and a structural design regulation (REP) updated repeatedly since 1985, now in the 2021 version. Engineers stress that the Pedro Miguel fault, running near the Canal less than 20 km from the capital and linked to the destructive 1621 earthquake, is what truly governs design there, and early-warning systems would give little notice for a rupture that close. The most vulnerable buildings are those from the mid-1980s or earlier, homes built without technical supervision, and structures on slopes, riverbanks, flood zones or filled mangroves; MIVIOT found corrosion and poor maintenance in two older Santa Ana blocks. Panama has a structural design regulation but no construction code defining who inspects what and when. The article lists questions condo buyers should ask - permit date, designer's licence, seismic sensors, post-quake inspection reports, maintenance records and earthquake insurance - and notes UTP will prepare recommendations for revising the code.