



Americans have been lulled into a false sense of security that they are prepared for a devastating [earthquake](#) , according to a report issued Wednesday by the National Research Council.

Among other recommendations, the report's 20-year "road map" for preparedness -- which was in the works long before a magnitude 9 quake hit [Japan](#) on March 11 -- calls on the U.S. to beef up earthquake research and improve forecasts and warning systems.

In California, scientists are five years into work on just the type of early-warning system the report endorses. The prototype system passed early tests with aplomb, successfully detecting the 2007 Alum Rock and 2008 Chino Hills quakes, both magnitude 5.4 temblors, before people could feel them.

But even as the federal government peruses the 20-year action plan one of its agencies commissioned, the early-warning project may be halted -- because of cuts in the 2012 federal budget.

"It's not clear that they'll be able to continue funding this," said [Richard Allen](#) , a professor at [UC Berkeley](#) who works on the project. "We're living on the brink, in multiple ways."

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