



A damaged road is seen after an earthquake. (Representative picture, courtesy of Columbia Journalism Review)

● People expected to experience strong shaking would hear a loud dinging and see a full-screen advisement to drop, cover and hold on

Reuters | Oakland, Calif.

Alphabet Inc's Google's Android phones yesterday started detecting earthquakes around the world to provide data that could eventually give billions of users precious seconds of warning of a tremor nearby, with an alerting feature first rolling out in California.

Japan, Mexico and California already use land-based sensors to generate warnings, aiming to cut injuries and property damage by giving people further away from

Android phones can currently separate earthquakes from vibrations caused by thunder or the device dropping only when the device is charging, stationary and has user permission to share data with Google.

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Google turns phones into quake sensors

More than 2.5 billion devices, including some tablets, run Google's Android operating system.

"We are on a path to delivering earthquake alerts wherever there are smartphones," said Richard Allen, director of University of California Berkeley's seismological lab and visiting faculty at Google over the last year.

Google's programme emerged from a week-long session 4-1/2

years ago to test whether the accelerometers in phones could detect car crashes, earthquakes and tornadoes, said principal software engineer Marc Stogaitis.

Accelerometers - sensors that measure direction and force of motion - are mainly used to determine whether a user is holding a phone in landscape or portrait mode.

The company studied historical accelerometer readings during earthquakes and found they could give some users up to a minute of notice.

If phones detect an earthquake, they send their city-level location to Google, which can triangulate the epicenter and estimate the magnitude with as few as several hundred reports, Stogaitis said.

The system will not work in regions including China where Google's Play Services software is blocked.

Google expects to issue its first alerts based on accelerometer readings next year. It also plans to feed

alerts for free to businesses that want to automatically shut off elevators, gas lines and other systems before the shaking starts.

To test its alerting abilities, Google is drawing in California from traditional government seismograph readings to alert Android users about earthquakes, similar to notifications about kidnappings or flooding.

People expected to experience strong shaking would hear a loud dinging and see a full-screen advisement to drop, cover and hold on, Stogaitis said. Those further away would get a smaller notification designed not to stir them from their sleep, while people too close to be warned will get information about post-quake safety, such as checking gas valves.

Alerts will trigger for earthquakes magnitude 4.5 or greater, and no app download is necessary.

Stogaitis also said Google has not discussed its plans with Apple Inc.

World Food Programme to send 50,000 T of wheat flour to Lebanon



A worker stands near freshly baked bread at a bakery in Beirut

● Current flour reserves will cover market needs for six weeks

● Lebanon consumes between 35,000 to 40,000 tonnes of wheat a month

Reuters | Dubai

The World Food Programme (WFP) will send 50,000 tonnes of wheat flour to Lebanon after last week's blast at Beirut's port destroyed its only silo with all the private stocks held there, a United Nations report said yesterday.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report said the flour would be sent "to stabilise the national supply and ensure there is no food shortage in the country".

A report on Friday said Lebanon's government held no strategic stockpile of grain before the explosion and all privately held stocks at the country's only grain silo were destroyed.

"An initial shipment of 17,500 tonnes is due to arrive in Beirut within the coming 10 days to supply bakeries for one month," the report said.

Lebanon consumes between 35,000 to 40,000

tonnes of wheat a month.

With no large grain silos to store wheat in, sending the shipments as flour is more efficient, Hesham Hassanein, regional grain consultant based in Cairo, said.

"Flour comes in bags and is ready to distribute to be baked to bread versus wheat that needs to be milled," Hassanein said.

Damage at the port from the blast is under assessment and most traffic is being diverted to Tripoli, which has only about a third of Beirut's capacity.

The UN report said the Beirut port was expected to remain inoperable for at least a month.

"A temporary bulk receiving facility is needed for grain imports to ensure adequate national stocks," it said.

The French millers' association said they were also shipping 500 tonnes of wheat flour to Lebanon as a donation from their stocks.

A first consignment of 250 tonnes left the southern French port of Toulon on Sunday aboard a navy vessel, and the rest of the flour is due to be shipped from France on Tuesday, the association said in a statement.

France's wheat growers association, meanwhile, is in talks with grain companies to assemble 25,000 tonnes of wheat to send as aid to Lebanon, its president, Eric Thirouin, said.

Greece condemns Turkish 'provocation' as maritime dispute deepens

AFP News

Greece yesterday demanded that Turkey withdraw a research ship at the heart of their growing dispute over maritime rights and warned it would defend its sovereignty, calling for an emergency meeting of EU foreign ministers to resolve the crisis.

Tensions were stoked Monday when Ankara dispatched the research ship Oruc Reis accompanied by Turkish naval vessels off the Greek island of Kastellorizo in the eastern Mediterranean.

In a televised statement, Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias urged Ankara to "immediately" remove the Oruc Reis from Greek waters.

"We call on Turkey to immediately depart from the Greek continental shelf," Dendias said. "We make it clear that Greece will defend its sovereignty."

The incident is the latest spat over energy exploration in the



Turkey has dispatched a research vessel for exploration off a Greek island, heightening tensions over disputed maritime rights

gas-rich eastern Mediterranean, a frequent source of disputes between Turkey and neighbours including Greece, Cyprus and Israel.

On the instructions of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, Dendias said he had asked for an emergency meeting of the European Union foreign af-

fairs council to discuss "Turkey's growing provocation and delinquency".

A spokesman for EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said

the situation was deeply concerning and needed to be solved through dialogue.

"Apparently the developments on the ground unfortunately show that... more needs to be done in order to defuse the tensions and reverse the very negative and unfortunate trend of escalation," spokesman Peter Stano told reporters.

"That's why (Borrell) stated that he is deploying all efforts necessary to re-establish the dialogue, positive constructive dialogue and to facilitate the re-engagement, and these efforts are ongoing."

Marine tracking on Tuesday located the vessel southeast of the island of Crete. It is escorted by a Turkish navy flotilla and shadowed by Greek warships.

An official Turkish picture shows the Oruc Reis escorted by five warships.

Turkey has announced the vessel would carry out activities between August 10 and 23.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said Tuesday his country would step up energy exploration in the eastern Mediterranean and would not "compromise" its rights.

Cavusoglu said Ankara would issue licences for new areas in the "western part of our continental shelf" from the end of August.

"We will conduct all kinds of seismic research, drilling activities. Our determination is absolute," Cavusoglu told reporters.

"We will defend the rights of Turkey... in the eastern Mediterranean and we will not compromise in any way on this," he said.

A similar crisis last month was averted after Turkey pulled the Oruc Reis back to hold talks with Greece and rotating EU chair Germany.

But the mood soured last week after Greece and Egypt signed an agreement to set up an exclusive economic zone in the region.