



SF GATE ARTICLE FROM JANUARY 3, 2012:

By Edward Guthmann

Special to the Chronicle

ANGWIN -- Native [Texan Larry Guillot](#) was a builder and general contractor when he moved from Austin to Berkeley 7 1/2 years ago. He started doing remodeling and home-addition jobs, but an interest in making his own house safer led to a specialty in earthquake preparedness (www.quakeprepare.com).

Guillot, 68, lives in Angwin, in upper Napa Valley, with his wife, Sara. Their three daughters and two grandsons live nearby.

I worry about folks in San Francisco and the East Bay. It is beyond belief how many people have their heads firmly embedded in the sand and just refuse to think about getting ready for what is definitely going to come.

I mean, what are they thinking? I speak to civic groups, and I've had many older people say, "Well, we lived through Loma Prieta and we did just fine. We'll be all right."

They don't realize that when the Hayward Fault ruptures - which it has every 140 years, and is now overdue - it's going to be much worse than the Loma Prieta. I guess it's just human nature that we don't want to think about unpleasant things.

When I started QuakePrepare six years ago, I saw that many people were totally clueless as to whether their home had been retrofitted for earthquakes. Or, if it had been, whether their retrofit was incomplete.

Probably the best retrofit contractor in the East Bay told me that a good third of his business was fixing bad retrofits.

The first thing I do in my consultations is crawl under the house. I've been in quite a few where there's no more than 18 inches clearance and I have to crawl on my belly like a reptile. I see how well the house is attached to the foundation and report my findings to the homeowners.

A lot of people think that "bolting the foundation" constitutes a retrofit. All that is, really, is driving bolts through the mudsill that sits on top of the foundation. Those bolts hold the mudsill on the foundation, but they don't hold the house on at all.

There are two more ingredients in a complete retrofit. First, most homes have a cripple wall, the space between the mudsill and the floor joists above. This cripple wall must have shear panel plywood applied to it. Second, the floor joists above the cripple wall must be correctly attached to that wall.

I'm comfortable explaining any bad news to the owners, because I decided from the outset not to do retrofits myself. I just didn't want the appearance of a conflict of interest.

The consultations give me great satisfaction, but an even bigger part of my business is installing automatic gas shutoff valves. We also provide the securing of furniture, appliances and wall hangings. And customers can order emergency kits through our website.

I'm often taken aback by the mistaken notions that native Californians have - like thinking a doorway is the best place to be when serious shaking starts. Bad idea. A swinging door can hurt you. Quite often the safest place is under a sturdy dining room table.

Whenever there is what I like to call a "quakelet" in the East Bay, my phone and e-mail get busier than normal. So when Berkeley had three of these mild but very scary quakes in one week back in late October, tons of people woke up.

Same thing happened after the Japan quake. But after a month or six weeks, it's back to business as usual and, "Let's just don't think about it." I just hope we've got more time to help people get ready.