‘Earthquakes’ may rattle folks far from the West Coast

By Alan Bash
USA TODAY

Graceland, all shook up.
That's the scenario put forth on ABC's World of Discovery special Saturday (6 p.m. ET/PT), in which geology experts predict a large-scale earthquake to rock Elvis' final resting place sometime in the next 50 years.

Memphis is, after all, the big city closest to an earthquake zone in the central U.S., says Kaye Shedlock of the U.S. Geological Survey. With a magnitude 6 quake on the Richter scale, "Graceland would shake from side to side, (sink) about an inch, but weather it fairly well," she says. Other parts of town might not be so lucky.

In true-to-sweeps form, Earthquakes: The Terrifying Truth, hosted by Martin Sheen, seeks to shatter the belief that only the West Coast has to fear the movement of the earth.

"It's a myth that the East Coast is immune," says Hofstra University's Charles Mergherian, who appears on the special. Mergherian says a big quake tends to hit the Big Apple about every 120 years, with the last one coming in 1884.

The special features footage from January's quake in Southern California, interspersed with Hollywood's big-screen versions of the Big One — mayhem in the streets, the letters on the Hollywood sign peeling off the mountain.

"It's certainly on the high-impact end," says geologist Alan Lindh of the one-hour documentary. Lindh, who also weighs in during the show — says that although the documentary may be a bit alarmist, he's happy it will at least "be a wake-up call" to the country's central and eastern regions.

People can do simple things to prepare for a quake, he says. "If you've got a children's room, you should attach (standing bookcases) to the walls; your kids should know to get under the table; they should know where the gas-shutoff valves are."

Viewers, though, shouldn't lose sleep over an impending Big One, says Lindh. "They've got tornadoes and hurricanes and crime on the streets to worry about."