

Google Android phones to assist with earthquake alerts and searches

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You may not need to scramble to check Twitter for all the details when the earth starts to shake.

Google is adding [earthquake](#) warning tools to users of the Android smartphone mobile operating system, like the Samsung Galaxy series.

Google says it will start working with the U.S. Geological Survey to help send earthquake alerts to Android devices, starting in California. Android will send alerts to phones in California from the ShakeAlert earthquake early warning system.

"With the growing cost of natural disasters worldwide, we saw an opportunity to use Android to provide people with timely, helpful earthquake information when they search, as well as a few seconds warning to get themselves and their loved ones to safety if needed," says Google, in a blog post.

Apple's iPhones don't have alerts built into the device but rely on apps to get the word out after the tremors start.

Google notes that not all quakes are in California, as evidenced by this weekend's series of tremors in Virginia and North Carolina. The company says Android phones can be turned into mini-seismometers now to detect when earthquakes and send advanced signals to the alerting system.

"We call this the Android Earthquake Alerting System," Google says in a blog post. "As a first step, the earthquakes that this system detects will be used to improve the speed and accuracy of earthquake information on Google Search. And in the near future, we'll use this technology to send early alerts to Android users in impacted areas."

Most smartphones come with tiny accelerometers and they can sense earthquakes, says Google. "They're even sensitive enough to detect the P-wave, which is the first wave that comes out of an earthquake and is typically much less damaging than the S-wave which comes afterward."

If the [phone](#) detects something that it thinks may be an earthquake, it sends a signal to Google's earthquake detection server, along with a coarse location of where the shaking occurred. The server then combines information from many phones to figure out if an earthquake is happening. "We're essentially racing the speed of light (which is roughly the speed at which signals from a phone travel) against the speed of an earthquake."

Google says that if you feel the earth start to move and you wonder if it's a quake, now you'll be able to look up "earthquake" or "earthquake near me," in Google search and find relevant results for your area, along with resources on what to do after an earthquake.

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