



Abiathar Peak - Yellowstone Park

## Dam malfunction not linked to quake

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A 2.7 magnitude earthquake was recorded 5.5 kilometers south-southwest of the Hebgen Lake dam the day the intake tower malfunctioned. But seismic experts say the quake probably didn't trigger the tower's still elusive malfunction.

"It's very unlikely, but you can never say 100 percent," said Debbie Smith, a seismic analyst from the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology.

Engineers have yet to identify what is broken inside the tower. Plans to insert a bulkhead to stem the water flow inside the structure were put on hold Sunday. As PPL employees were attempting to install a casing, designed to act as a guide for the bulkhead, they deemed the operation too dangerous, said David Hoffman, a spokesman for PPL, which owns the dam.



DEIRDRE EITEL/CHRONICLE Efforts to stem the flow of water through the Hebgen Lake Dam tower, shown on the left, to allow for repairs have been delayed.

"It became apparent after it got down into that turbulent water that it was not safe," Hoffman said Monday.

Smith said that during the week of Aug 7, about 300 earthquakes shook the Yellowstone region, some even stronger than the one that occurred the morning the Hebgen Lake intake tower acted up.

"They get earthquakes every day, all the time. Maybe it's cumulative, who knows," Smith said.

PPL Montana wasn't aware the earthquake happened before the intake tower malfunctioned, Hoffman said.

"We were aware of a 1.8," Hoffman said. "It appeared to occur after this report was first made."

Original seismic reports indicated the quake's magnitude was smaller. But those numbers are often updated after the fact, Smith said.

The 2.7 magnitude quake was recorded at 7:18 a.m. that morning, Aug 31.

By 2:30 p.m., the Madison County Dispatch Center was receiving calls notifying them something was wrong at the dam, said Steve DiGiovanna from Madison County emergency services.

Also that afternoon, a fisherman on the riverbank near the dam reported to emergency responders that he heard a loud noise, said Madison County Undersheriff Roger Thomson.

"They heard kind of a pop and kind of a vacuum, sucking sound," Thomson said.

Hoffman said it's tough to say if the quake triggered the incident.

"I just really can't even speculate," he said. "I don't know."

PPL is looking at other ways to investigate the tower malfunction, such as using cameras. The company continues to bring in outside experts, Hoffman said.

"A lot of really good people are working really hard on this," he said.

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