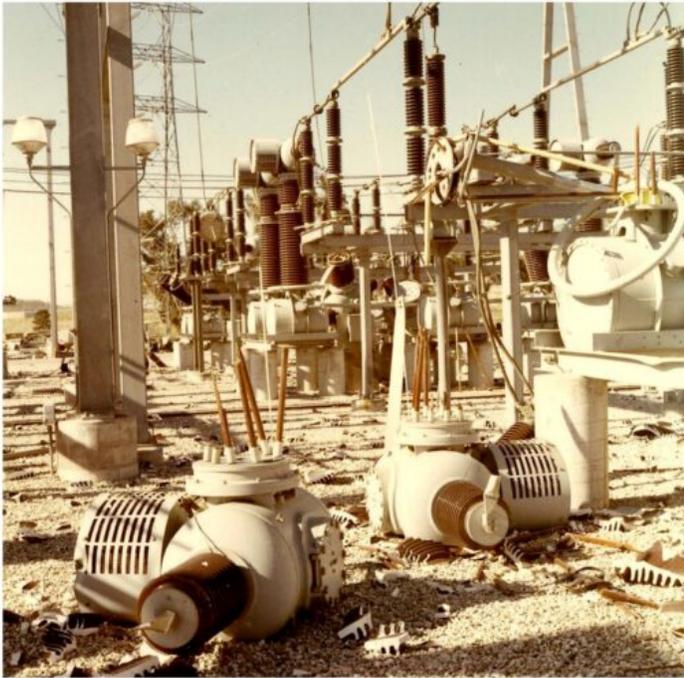




## Commemorating 50 Years After Sylmar Earthquake



During the 1971 San Fernando earthquake, the Van Norman Dam (right) came close to breaching while the Sylmar Converter Station (left) was severely damaged. (Photos from the LADWP photo archives)

By Dawn Cotterell

On February 9, 1971 at 6 a.m., a magnitude 6.5 earthquake struck the San Fernando Valley, causing

major damage throughout the city of Los Angeles and surrounding areas. Hundreds of schools and thousands of homes were destroyed and overpasses collapsed. Approximately 64 people lost their lives.

LADWP saw devastating impacts on the water and power systems. The Van Norman Dam came close to breaching, forcing about 80,000 residents to be evacuated. Sylmar Converter Station, which had been completed only a year prior, was severely damaged. The water distribution pipeline network suffered more than 1,000 leaks.

On February 9, 2021 LADWP commemorated the 50th anniversary of the earthquake by joining in the UCLA Lifelines webinar, where more than 600 industry experts, academia and others participated. Steve Cole, Manager of Water Engineering and Technical Services (WETS), presented at the event, covering what happened 50 years ago, infrastructure improvements made since and how we are now more prepared.

“Earthquakes have been one of the most significant learning lessons in the field of engineering. Certainly, being in earthquake country it has driven our design and inspired changes in what we do,” said General Manager and Chief Engineer Martin Adams. “We have had significant changes in the design criteria, particularly regarding dam construction and building construction for the critical water facilities.”

LADWP is a leader in the country for our work installing earthquake resistant pipe that was developed in Japan. We’ve also focused on improving our power system infrastructure by upgrading facilities, replacing wood poles with fiber glass and steel poles, upgrading circuits and more.

The webinar also featured a video produced by the Department’s Communications and Public Affairs team, which brought to life visuals demonstrating the damage caused from the 1971 earthquake and included interviews with Adams, retired LADWP employee Craig Davis and UCLA expert and professor Ertugrul Taciroglu.

[Watch the video](#)

Earthquakes are a reality of life for us in Southern California. LADWP is constantly striving to increase the reliability of our water infrastructure, from intake to tap, and working to guard our power system against disasters. The safety of our staff, our customers and the community at large is, and will remain, the backbone of our daily operations.