

Reno expert: Japan's quake 'a completely different class'

By Steve Timko, Reno Gazette-Journal

If the world was a bell then Friday's earthquake in Japan would leave it ringing for a month, the head of the Nevada Seismological Laboratory said.

"This is a completely different class of earthquake," said Graham Kent, director of the seismology lab at the University of Nevada, Reno.

He struggled to describe the enormity of a magnitude 8.9 earthquake like that one that struck off the coast of Japan at 9:46 p.m. Thursday Reno time.

For one thing, Kent said, it's big enough that it slightly affected the earth's rotation on its axis.

"It's so big that it sets the earth in a vibration mode that will have it ringing for a month," Kent said.

He also scoffed at media reports that attempted to show the epicenter of the quake. A magnitude 9.3 earthquake that struck off the coast of Sumatra in December 2004, for instance, had a fault line move that was more than 620 miles long, he said. Kent is guessing Friday's quake in Japan had a rupture point 360 miles to 500 miles long.

"A little point on the map means nothing," he said.

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