U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

STATE

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SPECIAL REPORT: EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI

Hope in Haiti

Leave Needed

OE said it would advise the mission on extending excused absences and other forms of leave to LE Staff. In Haiti, LE Staff—even those from differing agencies—may donate annual leave to other LE Staff if they and the recipient are paid under the same local compensation plan and receive their pay via the same Global Financial Services payroll office. However, leave is not transferrable between American employees and LE Staff, according to OE, because they are on separate pay plans.

Earthquakes hit U.S. embassies often enough that the Department has procedures in place arising from past experience. Yet no capital city has lately been hit by such a large quake as that which struck Haiti. The closest, in terms of casualties, was Managua in 1972—and that quake caused one-tenth the casualties expected from the Haitian disaster.

Ebert-Gray said determining how to help embassy employees in Haiti is a continuing process that will leave the Department better able to address disasters affecting colleagues in the future.

The author is deputy editor of State Magazine.

Embassy Rides Out Haiti Earthquake

/// By Jonathan Blyth

In the spring of 2008, the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations completed construction of a new embassy compound for the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. As with all new diplomatic facilities, the bureau made certain the structure was earthquake-resistant.

To accomplish this, the bureau made sure its structural engineering design strictly adhered to the International Building Code and to the OBO supplement to that code. The supplement covers unique design requirements for each U.S. diplomatic post and details the building's design requirements, including those for withstanding gravity, snow, wind, earthquakes and even explosions.

When doing a site study, OBO's Office of Design and Engineering identifies the project's design criteria relating to such things as seismic forces and wind load. The study takes place at least a year prior to construction and leads the office to recommend what it believes will be the most effective structure.

The preferred earthquake-resistant system is the one used at Embassy Port-au-Prince and includes reinforced concrete shear walls and mechanical, electrical, fire protection and other systems that can withstand the stresses of an earthquake. Embassy Port-au-Prince, in fact, was designed to meet the highest seismic design criteria and to withstand winds of 100 miles per hour.

Told the facility suffered only minor nonstructural damage from the earthquake, Rod Evans, OBO project director during the embassy's construction, said he wasn't surprised.

"I would have been amazed if it didn't survive," he said. "The ability of the embassy to withstand a 7.0-magnitude earthquake is testimony to OBO's building design criteria, the American contractor's construction expertise and the hard work of the many Haitian workers who contributed to building the facility."

The author is director of external affairs at the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations.

Claudia Cordeiro, regional training coordinator of the Miami Passport Agency, holds a child in Port-au-Prince. **Right:** A tent city was erected for remaining embassy employees inside the embassy compound.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (LEFT): CONSULAR AFFAIRS; (OPPOSITE PAGE): DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE