



The West Beverly Hills Lineament and Beverly Hills High School: Ethical Issues in Geo-Hazard Communication

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Results of geotechnical studies for the Westside Subway were disclosed in a public hearing on Oct. 19, 2011, showing new “active faults” of the Santa Monica fault and the West Beverly Hills Lineament (WBHL), identified as a northern extension of the Newport-Inglewood fault. Presentations made spoke of the danger posed by these faults, the possibility of killing people, and how it was good news that these faults had been discovered now instead of later. The presentations were live and are now memorialized as YouTube videos, (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Omx2BTIpzAk> and others). No faults had been physically exposed or observed by the study; the faults were all interpreted from cone penetrometer probes, supplemented by core borings and geophysical transects. Several of the WBHL faults traversed buildings of the Beverly Hills High School (BHHS), triggering the school district to geologically map and characterize these faults for future planning efforts, and to quantify risk to the students in the 1920’s high school building. 5 exploratory trenches were excavated within the high school property, 12 cone penetrometers were pushed, and 26-cored borings were drilled. Geologic logging of the trenches and borings and interpretation of the CPT data failed to confirm the presence of the mapped WBHL faults, instead showing an unfaulted, 3° NE dipping sequence of mid-Pleistocene alluvial fan deposits conformably overlying an ~1 Ma marine sand. Using ¹⁴C, OSL, and soil pedology for stratigraphic dating, the BHHS site was cleared from fault rupture hazards and the WBHL was shown to be an erosional margin of Benedict Canyon, partially buttressed by 40-200 ka alluvial deposits from Benedict Wash. The consequence of the Westside Subway’s active fault maps has been the unexpected expenditure of millions of dollars for emergency fault investigations at BHHS and several other private properties within a densely developed urban highrise environment. None of these studies have found any active faults where they had been interpreted, mapped, and published by the subway’s consultants. Litigation is underway by the affected parties to recoup their geological expenditures and recover costs for lost business revenues. Even had the active fault map been correct, its public release was poorly managed. That the released active fault map has now been found to be badly in error poses more significant ethical issues about hazard communication and likely legal consequences.