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THIS WARNING TAKES THE QUAKE

By ROBERT WEDDLE
NEW YORK could be hit by a devastating earthquake, scientists said yesterday.

Reporting on ground-breaking new research, they said high-density fault lines have been discovered beneath the East River.

"The idea of a seismically dead New York is out the window," said Prof. Charles Merguerian of Hofstra University on Long Island.

His shocking view

was backed by Leonardo Seeber of the Lamont Doherty Geological Observatory in Palisades, N.Y., who heads the New York-New Jersey Seismic Network.

Merguerian said he discovered seven faults and hundreds of minor earth fractures last summer during construction of an East River water tunnel linking Manhattan to Long Island City.

He took rock samples and scores of photographs, which

he plans to present at a Hofstra symposium April 14 in Hempstead, L.I.

"I'm not predicting a major earthquake," he said. "But we can no longer say it is impossible.

"Architects should take this into account in designing new buildings."

The East River faults, one inch wide by hundreds of feet long, have been covered by fresh concrete since

Merguerian collected his data.

Similar faults also were discovered by Merguerian and Seeber last year in a Manhattan-Yonkers water tunnel beneath 125th Street.

The faults ran west-northwest — the same direction as the faults in the earthquake that struck Westchester last October, said Seeber.

That quake registered 4.0 on the Richter scale, ranking it as a minor temer.

"We know there is danger," Seeber said. "The question is how

much. "I would say a major earthquake in New York City is unlikely, but it is possible — and it would be a major disaster. "A magnitude 7.0 [severe] quake hit Charleston, S.C., just 100 years ago," Seeber said.

"Whether that could happen here is the most important question on my mind." Seeber, whose network records all seismic activity in New York and New Jersey,

said his view is the "conservative" one in the field.

The last sizable quake in New York City damaged buildings but caused no death or injury, he said. It occurred in 1884 and was estimated at magnitude 5.0, or moderate.

A quake like the Westchester one strikes once every 30 years in the New York area, said Seeber, who has been monitoring seismic activity for 15 years.