

**LETTER TO THE EDITOR:**

Dear Sir,

**Re: “Revised Isoseismal Maps for the 1956 Bay of Plenty and 1987 Edgecumbe, New Zealand, Earthquakes – Implications for Seismic Hazard and Risk” by David Dowrick, Bulletin, Vol 40, No. 4, December 2007.**

The hope, identified as important by the author, that improvement of the map of shaking intensities generated by the 1987 Edgecumbe earthquake will offer means to improve the relationship between intensity and mean damage ratio for the event cannot be realized for housing damage. Sadly, the cost record for this is so unreliable as to be useless. A large part of loss was to masonry chimneys, estimated to have been to 2,500 of them (*Beacon*, 20 March, 1987) and there is compelling reason to believe that by far the greater part of this loss was not attributable to the earthquake. Heat burst damage in masonry chimneys is a ubiquitous condition. Although it differs strikingly from earthquake damage, experience is needed for recognition. Errors were certainly made by assessors who were not properly briefed. Moreover, in Kawerau, where shaking was moderate, there was wholesale chimney demolition by borough workers and the Fire Service, acting with State-of-Emergency conferred powers. Many chimneys were down before owners or assessors could see them, condemned by smoke test, which a heat-burst chimney would fail, or by indiscriminating inspection. We examined a large random sample of chimney damage claims in EQC files without finding a single instance where a claim was declined for reason of heat burst. In fact, we found no mention of the common phenomenon and that is incredible.

In the circumstances, rather more than 25% of insured housing and contents losses, \$1987 20.2 million, is suspect, and no resolution is possible now.

G. W. Butcher  
A. L. Andrews