Some woodframe building earthquake damage can be life-threatening, as in the case of collapse or near-collapse. More frequently, the primary threat is economic in nature.

Wood buildings have been seismically researched much less than other basic types of construction—concrete, masonry, and steel—although approximately 80% of the buildings in the USA are made of wood. In California, 99% of the dwelling units are in woodframe buildings, and wood is commonly used for schools and for smaller office and commercial buildings.

1933 Long Beach Earthquake
photo credit: Austin Studio
Collapse of unbraced cripple walls beneath the first floor is a vulnerability still common in older homes today.

1971 San Fernando Earthquake
photo credit: EERC-NISEE
While it is often said that wooden framing is flexible and absorbs seismic stress, the sheathing materials and their attachment to the frame are just as essential. In this case, the earthquake struck before the sheathing had been applied.

1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake
photo credit: GFDS Engineers
Soft-story collapse or near-collapse was evident in some cases in this Bay Area earthquake.

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1994 Northridge Earthquake
photo credit: R. Reitherman
An unknown number of multi-family buildings with parking in ground level, probably in the tens of thousands, exist in California

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