Like a droplet suspended from a faucet, then falling into a pool of water, earthquakes result from the sudden conversion of potential energy, stored elastically in rocks, to kinetic energy. This energy, in the form of seismic waves, then travels outward in all directions like ripples formed from a droplet striking water. Although falling droplets of water don’t cause earthquakes, this visual analogy that uses data from about 400 seismic stations to illustrate how the ground moves as seismic waves spread outward from an earthquake epicenter.

www.iris.edu/waves