

How to Prepare for a Major Earthquake (or other disaster)

by Richard Smith, Member, Community Emergency Response Team

A disaster is any event that “overwhelms existing resources”. We immediately think of the big earthquake that everyone is always talking about, and we do need to prepare for our well-being in such an event.

But other disasters may also loom ahead, including possible flooding, electrical blackouts, or even acts of terrorism, civil disturbance, or hazardous materials accidents. Preparing in advance is the best way to increase our chances of survival.

Being prepared means knowing what to do *before, during and after* an earthquake. The following actions are recommended by the Federal Emergency Management Agency:

WHAT TO DO NOW

- Move beds away from windows
- Move pictures and other hanging objects away from beds
- Keep a pair of shoes next to your bed
- Keep supplies on hand and in a place that would be accessible if your home collapsed
- Supplies should include water (at least 3 gallons/person—more for pets), a flashlight and a portable radio (with fresh batteries), packaged or canned food (water and maybe a portable stove for cooking, and a manual can opener), a fire extinguisher, extra blankets and clothing, a first aid kit, and tools (including hammers and a crow bar to dig yourself out if necessary).
- Make and practice a plan for what to do during an earthquake (include identification of safe places in your home to go to, plus primary escape routes and how to shut off utilities if necessary)
- Make a plan for reuniting all family members after a quake
- Have an out-of-state family phone contact
- Check that smoke detectors are installed on each level of your home and in working order.



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DURING AN EARTHQUAKE

- Keep away from windows
- Get under a heavy table or desk and hold on, or sit against an inside wall (if in a wheelchair-lock your wheels)
- “Drop, cover and hold”
- If unable to get out of bed, pull the sheets and covers over you and use your pillow to cover and protect your head and neck
- If indoors, stay there
- If outdoors, stay outdoors away from buildings, trees and power lines which might fall on you
- If in your car, drive to a clear spot and stay in your car (don't stop on or under overpasses)
- Do not use elevators

AFTER THE SHAKING STOPS

- Put shoes on to protect from broken glass
- Do not use telephones, except in emergencies
- Check for injuries and fires
- Use flashlight to inspect home for damage, including gas, water, and electrical appliances and water
- If you smell gas or if there is a fire, turn off the main gas valve - switch off individual circuit breakers, then switch off the main
- If your home is unsafe, get everyone out
- Use your portable radio for information
- Do not use your vehicle, except in emergencies
- Do not go into damaged areas
- Expect aftershocks, which may be as serious as the original quake.

Besides these basic guidelines, the American Red Cross recommends other precautions be taken:

- Make an emergency information list to let others know who to call if they find you unconscious or unable to speak (besides your out-of-state contacts, the list should also include everyone in your immediate support network—friends, neighbors, relatives, doctor, etc.—provide a copy of this



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list to your out-of-state contact)

- The emergency list should also include specific instructions to rescuers, such as: “Please take my oxygen tank, wheelchair, gamma globulin from the freezer, insulin from refrigerator, communication device from under the bed”, etc.—or- “Please do not straighten my knees, they are fused in a bent position”, etc.
- If you have a communication disability, make sure your emergency information list notes the best way to communicate with you (writing notes, pointing to letters, finding a quiet place, etc.)
- Make a medical information list, which should have information about all of your medical providers, the names of your medications (including dosages, times and the condition being treated), any allergies or sensitivities, needed adaptive equipment, - copies of health insurance cards
- It is suggested that we keep *at least* a seven day supply of essential medications with us at all times
- Keep your motor vehicle fuel tank more than half full at all times and stock vehicle with a small disaster supplies kit
- Have a care plan for your service animal or pet, and keep appropriate collars, leashes, harnesses (plus copies of tags, licenses, and vaccination records), medications and food with your emergency supplies.

Being prepared requires more than good intentions. To help protect ourselves and our loved ones, and have a better chance to survive a major disaster, we need to actually make our plans, gather our supplies and get organized.

Why not make it a game? Spend the next week or two getting things ready—involve friends and family.

Please don't put off your preparations. Hopefully you will never need to use your disaster supplies, but there is a good chance you may!

[SOURCES: Federal Emergency Management Agency publication SM-317;
American Red Cross website <<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster>>]

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