

Earthquake Preparedness

When we think of earthquakes in this country, California springs to mind most often. Indeed, Californians have been waiting and planning for "the big one" for decades. But earthquakes can occur anywhere there is a fault line. In fact, the strongest earthquakes ever reported in the United States took place in the nineteenth century in Missouri.

What can you do to prepare for an earthquake? First, discuss earthquake preparedness within your family and run a practice drill: If shaking begins, protect yourself by ducking under a strong table or desk away from windows. Cover your head to protect yourself from debris or breaking glass. Never run outside during an earthquake. Just outside a building is the most dangerous place to be.

Develop an earthquake plan at home and at school. You may be separated from your family for several hours should an earthquake occur, so discuss within your family how you would handle such an emergency.

You can also store emergency supplies for use at the time of a disaster. Plan to include flashlights, a battery-operated radio, extra batteries, a fire extinguisher, a first-aid kit, food, water, water purification tablets, and warm clothes (including shoes) for everyone in the family. A scissors jack or hydraulic jack could save a life.

For cooking and heat, store charcoal or a camp stove with fuel, matches, and candles. Be sure to be very careful using the candles and other flammables, especially around young children.

Finally, if an earthquake does occur in your area, keep the following in mind:

- Do not panic. The shaking and rolling is frightening, but unless something falls on top of you, it is harmless. Keep calm and ride out the waves.
- If you are outside, stay away from buildings and utility wires.
- If you are in a car, stop and stay inside. A car is your safest place to be while the shaking continues.

Once the shaking stops remember to:

- Check your utilities. The movement may have cracked water mains, gas pipes, or electrical conduits. If you smell gas, open windows and shut off the main gas valve. Then leave the building and report the leak.
- Tune your radio to receive the latest emergency bulletins.
- Stay off the phone except to report emergencies.
- Stay out of severely damaged buildings. Aftershocks sometimes cause more damage than main shocks when they topple weakened buildings.

STUDENT VOICES



At the time of the earthquake, I was in the kitchen with my mom, dad, and three brothers. The plates, cups, and food were coming out of the shelves. I got my little brother and got under the dinner table. I told him that everything was okay because he was scared. During the first few days following the earthquake, I couldn't sleep because it might happen at night.

Laura Huerta
Castroville, California