

1.10.3 Personal Safety During an Earthquake

The previous sections have concentrated on making your environment safer before the next earthquake. What should you do during an earthquake? The next big earthquake will be less traumatic if you:

- 1) prepare an earthquake plan and practice it;
- 2) know what to do during a big earthquake; and
- 3) store supplies to make life more comfortable after the earthquake (see Section 1.10.4, After the Earthquake).

1.10.3.1 PREPARE A PLAN

How rational do you think you will be during the violent shaking of a major earthquake? Before the next earthquake, get together with your family or housemates to plan now what you will do during and after that event.

- 1) Teach everyone to "duck, cover, and hold."
- 2) Identify safe spots in every room, such as sturdy desks and tables, and interior walls.
- 3) Teach everyone who could be home alone how to turn off the gas--but only if they smell or hear a leak.
- 4) Establish an out-of-area contact person who can be called by all family members to relay information. In an emergency, out-of-area calls are often easier to place than local calls.
- 5) Store supplies and prepare a personal earthquake bag.

Practice your plan often before the next earthquake, so habit can overcome fear. Also work with your neighbors to prepare a neighborhood plan. You may have elderly or disabled neighbors who could need your help. The support of friends and neighbors could reduce the stress for everyone.

1.10.3.2 DUCK, COVER, AND HOLD

During an earthquake, duck or drop to the floor, take cover under a sturdy desk or table, and hold onto it so that it doesn't move away from you. Wait there until the shaking stops.

The area near the exterior walls of a building is the most dangerous place to be. Windows, facades, and architectural details are the first parts of the building to collapse. To stay away from this danger zone, stay inside if you are inside and outside if you are outside.

Do not try to run outside or to another room--severe shaking will make it difficult to move. Duck, cover, and hold--wherever you are. Doorways are no safer than elsewhere in the home. If your building actually begins to collapse, you are safest under a sturdy piece of furniture that can shield you from falling debris.

If you are

- *Indoors:* Duck, cover, and hold. If you are not near a desk or table, drop to the floor against an interior wall and protect your head and neck with your arms. Avoid exterior walls, windows, hanging objects, mirrors, and tall furniture.
- *In a high-rise:* Duck, cover, and hold. Avoid windows and other hazards. Do not use elevators. Do not be surprised if sprinkler systems or fire alarm activate.
- *Outdoors:* Move to a clear area if you can safely do so; avoid power lines, trees, signs, buildings, vehicles, and other hazards.
- *Driving:* Pull over to the side of the road, stop, and set the parking brake. Avoid overpasses, bridges, power lines, signs, and other hazards. Stay inside the vehicle until the shaking is over. If a power line falls on the car, stay inside until a trained person removes the wire.
- *In a kitchen:* Get away from the stove, refrigerator, and cabinets with heavy objects, leaving the kitchen if necessary. Get under a table. Duck, cover, and hold.
- *In a stadium or theater:* Stay at your seat and protect your head and neck with your arms. Don't try to leave until the shaking is over. Then walk out slowly watching for anything that could fall in the aftershocks.
- *In a mall:* Move away from display shelves. Look for sturdy furniture or an interior wall. Duck, cover, and hold.

1.10.4 After the Earthquake