

When An Earthquake Affects Your Area

Earthquakes can strike suddenly without any notice. One moment you are working at your desk and the next moment you are in the dark and uncertain of the damage that has occurred from the earthquake. Feelings of helplessness and what to do are common.

Keep in mind that the first 72 hours after an earthquake are critical. Electricity, gas, water, and telephones may not be working. Police and fire departments will be busy with serious crises. You will need to be self-sufficient during this time. Below are things that you can do and precautions to follow after an earthquake occurs.

Aftershocks

Be prepared for additional earth movements called “aftershocks.” Although most of these are smaller than the main earthquake, some may be large enough to cause additional damage or bring down weakened structures.

Because other aftereffects can include fires, chemical spills, landslides, dam breaks, and tidal waves, be sure to monitor your battery-operated radio or TV for additional emergency information.

Injuries

Check for injuries. Do not attempt to move injured or unconscious people unless they are in immediate danger from live electrical wires, flooding, or other hazards. Internal injuries may not be evident, but may be serious or life threatening. If someone has stopped breathing, call for medical or first aid assistance immediately and begin CPR if you are trained to do so. Stop a bleeding injury by applying direct pressure to the wound. If you are trapped, try to attract attention to your location.

Checking Utilities

An earthquake may break gas, electrical, and water lines. If you smell gas: (1) open windows; (2) shut off the main gas valve; (3) do not turn any electrical appliances or lights on or off; (4) go outside; (5) report the leak to authorities; and (6) do not reenter the building until a utility official says it is safe to do so.

If electric wiring is shorting out, shut off the electric current at the main box.

If water pipes are damaged, shut off the supply at the main valve.

Other Precautions

- Have chimneys inspected for cracks and damage. Do not use the fireplace if the chimney has any damage.
- Check to see if sewage lines are intact before using bathrooms or plumbing.
- Do not touch downed power lines or objects in contact with downed lines. Report electrical hazards to the authorities.

- Immediately clean up spilled medicines, drugs, flammable liquids, and other potentially hazardous materials.
- Stay off all telephones except to report an emergency. Replace telephone receivers that may have been knocked off by the earthquake.
- Stay away from damaged areas. Your presence could hamper relief efforts, and you could endanger yourself.
- Cooperate fully with public safety officials. Respond to requests for volunteer assistance from police, fire fighters, emergency management officials, and relief organizations, but do not go into damaged areas unless assistance has been requested.

Evacuating Your Home

If you must evacuate your home:

- Post a message in a prearranged location known only to family members, indicating where you have gone.
- Confine pets to the safest location possible and make sure they have plenty of food and water. Pets will not be allowed in designated public shelters.
- Take vital documents (wills, insurance policies, etc.), emergency supplies, and extra medications with you.