

Post Earthquake

The time to prepare for a major earthquake is NOW. Once the earth starts to move, it will be too late to make a plan, take that First Aid class or put together a family communications plan. The fact is, in a major regional earthquake, we will have to depend on each other for several days following the event. Emergency responders and city services are going to be stretched to unimaginable limits. Power lines will be down and the telephone communications severely damaged. If you have not already put together a plan, today is the time to start.

In previous articles we recommended how to prepare for an earthquake and actions to take during the event, specifically - "Drop. Cover. Hold on." Now that the ground under you has stopped trembling, you will want to assess the overall situation. First, check yourself and those around you for minor injuries that can be treated following standard First Aid practices. Use the phone ONLY to call for life threatening emergencies. Next, if you smell gas or hear a constant hissing sound, then shut off the gas. Be certain you know where your shut-off is at the meter. You will then want to check your home for damage and make sure the area is safe; downed electrical lines, water main breaks or hazardous material spills. Do not, under any circumstances, approach downed power lines or attempt to move the lines. Once you feel that you and your family are safe, you should check on your neighbors, particularly the elderly and disabled. Check to see that your phone lines are working. Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members in your neighborhood may be aiding in a damage assessment of your neighborhood. You should convey any information regarding personal injuries and structural damage to identified CERT members. The CERT members have been trained to assist and work with first responders.

You and your family should have an out-of-state contact since local area phone lines may be jammed or damaged. Each family member should have been instructed to call the same contact who can then relay information about location, injuries and plans of the others. Your personal survival kit should include a radio and spare batteries to get up-to-the-minute information and instructions from local and regional authorities. Finally, be prepared for aftershocks, which could be equally as powerful as the original earthquake.