CRISIS24 HORIZON

Advice Sheet - Personal Safety during Earthquakes

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Categories: Environment

An earthquake is a sudden shaking of the earth caused by the breaking and shifting of rock beneath the earth's surface. Earthquakes give no warning and can happen anywhere. They can cause buildings and bridges to collapse and telephone and power lines to fall, and can result in fires, explosions, tsunamis, and landslides.

How to Respond

During an Earthquake

- Stay inside until the shaking stops. Most injuries during earthquakes occur when people are hit by falling objects when entering or exiting buildings.
- Drop, cover, and hold on. Minimize your movements during an earthquake; move quickly to get to the nearest safe place, then stay there.
- If you are indoors, take cover under a sturdy desk, table or bench, or against an inside wall. Stay away from glass, windows, outside doors or walls, and anything that could fall, such as lighting fixtures or furniture. If you are in bed, stay there, and protect your head and neck with a pillow; leave the bed if you are under a heavy light fixture that could fall.
- If you are not near a table or desk, cover your face and head with your arms and crouch in an inside corner of the building. Do not seek shelter in a doorway unless you know that it is a strongly supported load-bearing doorway.
- If you are outdoors, stay there. Move away from buildings, streetlights, and utility wires. Move away from the coastline as there is a chance that a tsunami could occur. If you are near a slope, cliff, or in a mountainous area, be vigilant for landslides or falling debris.

If you are in a crowded indoor public location:

- Stay where you are. Do not rush for the doorways.
- Move away from tall objects that may fall.
- Take cover and grab something to shield your head and face from falling debris and glass.
- Be aware that the electricity may go out or the sprinkler systems or fire alarms may turn on.
- DO NOT use elevators. If you must go out after an earthquake, watch for fallen objects, downed electrical wires, and weakened walls, bridges, roads, and sidewalks.

If you are in a moving vehicle:

- Pull over and stop as quickly and safely as possible.
- Engage the parking brake and stay in the vehicle.
- Avoid stopping near or under buildings, trees, overpasses, or utility wires.
- After the quake, proceed cautiously, watching for road and bridge damage.

After an Earthquake

- Be prepared for aftershocks. These secondary shock waves are usually less violent than the main quake but can be strong enough to do additional damage to weakened structures.
- Check for injuries. Do not attempt to move seriously injured persons unless they are in immediate danger of death or further injury. If you must move an unconscious person, first stabilize the neck and back, then call for help immediately.
- If the electricity goes out, use flashlights or battery-powered lanterns. Do not use candles, matches, or open flames indoors after the earthquake because of possible gas leaks.
- Wear sturdy shoes in areas covered with fallen debris and broken glass.
- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline, and other flammable liquids. Evacuate the building if gasoline or other fumes are detected and the building is not well ventilated. Ventilate by opening windows and doorways to the outside.
- Visually inspect utility lines and appliances for damage.
- If you smell gas or hear a hissing or blowing sound, open a window and leave immediately. Shut off the main gas valve if it is outside. Report the leak to the gas company from the nearest working phone or mobile phone. Stay out of the building. Always turn off the gas before you turn off the electricity.
- Switch off electrical power at the main fuse box or circuit breaker if electrical damage is suspected.
- Shut off the water supply at the main valve if interior water pipes are damaged. Do not flush toilets until you know that sewage lines are intact.
- Stay off the streets. If you must go out, watch for fallen objects, downed electrical wires, and weakened walls, bridges, roads, and sidewalks.
- Evacuate and move away from damaged buildings. Do not enter damaged buildings. Stay away from damaged areas unless your assistance has been specifically requested by police, fire, or relief organizations.
- If a tsunami threat is present, move inland or to higher ground as quickly as possible.

If You Are Trapped in debris:

- Do not light a match.

- Do not move about or kick up dust. Cover your mouth with a handkerchief or clothing.
- Tap on a pipe or wall so rescuers can locate you. Shout only as a last resort, as shouting can cause you to inhale dangerous amounts of dust.
- Send a text, bang on a pipe or wall, or use a whistle.
- Use the phone only to report life-threatening emergencies.
- Listen to news reports for the latest emergency information.

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