

Spot The Safety Violation: So Much for Earthquake Preparedness



In an earthquake, should you be more concerned about the drawers in the file cabinets or the chairs on top of them'



Properly preparing your workplace for emergencies means preparing for not only fires, structural collapses and other safety incidents but also any natural disasters, such as hurricanes, floods and earthquakes, that your workplace may be vulnerable to due to its location.

This picture from the US Naval Safety Center was taken inside a workplace in Washington State, which is at risk of earthquakes like BC to its north. While it's laudable that someone posted this sign reminding employees of the importance of fully closing file cabinet drawers in the event of an earthquake, perhaps that individual should've been more concerned about the safety hazard the chairs sitting on top of these cabinets would certainly pose to workers during tremors.

14 Steps for Earthquake Preparedness

The [Emergency Preparedness for Industry and Commerce Council](#) (EPICC) in BC spells out these 14 steps workplaces should take to prepare for earthquakes:

Step #1: Brief staff. Tell your staff what they have to do before, during and after an earthquake'at work, in the office, on the road or at home.

Step #2: Prepare emergency supplies. Keep enough emergency food, water, heat, lighting and sanitation supplies to last the average number of people on the premises for at least 72 hours.

Step #3: Assess building vulnerability. Assess how vulnerable your building is to earthquakes'even if you lease the premises. Structural engineers or contractors may be of assistance. In addition, decide what type of temporary premises you may need.

Step #4: Reduce hazards. Identify and reduce earthquake hazards within the premises'such as chairs stacked on top of cabinets.

Step #5: Consider hazardous substances. Review procedures for the storage, use, transport and disposal of any dangerous goods or hazardous materials in your workplace and prepare an inventory of them.

Step #6: Assign tasks to staff. To remove any uncertainty as to what staff should do in an emergency, assign them tasks to help them respond as quickly as possible. And train them so they know what to expect.

Step #7: Determine critical resources. Determine the critical resources of your business, such as supplies, equipment and stock. Establish a backup supplier, preferably from outside of impacted area.

Step #8: Assess transportation issues. Consider how critical resources could be shipped or transported if normal routes aren't available.

Step #9: Identify vital records. Identify vital business

records and documents, and store duplicates off premises. Set up a system for making regular backups.

Step #10: Consider alternative communication methods. Telephone systems may be disrupted during and after an earthquake. So consider alternate methods of communication with employees, suppliers and customers.

Step #11: Review insurance. Determine your earthquake insurance needs and arrange for additional coverage if required.

Step #12: Coordinate plans. Coordinate emergency plans with other building tenants, neighbours and business partners.

Step #13: Prepare for community Involvement. Earthquakes affect entire communities, not just businesses. Your business may play a role in the recovery of your neighborhood or municipality. For example, officials may ask to use your facility as emergency shelter. Contact your local municipal Emergency Management Office to discuss your possible role.

Step #14: Practice. As they say, practice makes perfect. So regularly practice earthquake response and recovery activities. And revise your plans based on the lessons that were learned from these exercises.

You can also use [this checklist](#) to prepare your workplace for earthquakes. And EPICC's [earthquake planning guide for businesses](#) contains useful information and checklists to help companies prepare for, weather and recover from these natural disasters. Natural Resources Canada's [website dedicated to earthquakes](#) includes a map of the areas in Canada most prone to quakes. And because BC is Canada's most earthquake-prone province, its emergency program includes detailed information on earthquake preparedness.

During the Quake

During an earthquake, tell your workers to do the following:

- If you're inside, stay there. The safest places are inside halls, in corners and in archways. Avoid areas near windows. Take cover under a heavy table, desk or any solid furniture. Protect your head and face. Doors may slam on your fingers if you're in a doorway.
- If you're outside, stay there and get clear of buildings and wires that could fall on you. Sidewalks next to tall buildings are particularly dangerous.
- Avoid elevators. If you're in an elevator when an earthquake happens, hit all floor buttons and get out when you can.
- If you're in a vehicle, pull over to the side (leave the road clear) and away from bridges, overpasses and buildings. Stay inside your vehicle.
- Remain in a protected place until the shaking stops. Anticipate aftershocks, which may occur soon after the first quake.
- Try to remain calm and help others.