You Can’t Predict an Earthquake, But You Can Prepare For One



As the recent disaster in Haiti has shown, earthquakes leave a path of destruction and chaos in their wakes. The US Geological Survey says an earthquake strikes somewhere on Earth every 11 seconds and an estimated 10,000 earthquake-related deaths occur worldwide every year.

Most earthquake deaths involve victims being crushed under collapsed structures, but people also die in tsunamis (killer waves stirred up at sea that come ashore), mudslides, fires and floods.

Many populated areas of North America sit on high-risk earthquake zones and survival often hinges on being prepared.

[box] A powerful earthquake hit B.C.’s Haida Gwaii over the weekend, while no major damage was caused by Saturday’s 7.7-magnitude quake, which was considered one of the biggest in Canadian history, tsunami advisories along the B.C. coast and in Hawaii were issued, and dozens of aftershocks were still felt throughout the province on Sunday. [/box]

Precautions Can Improve Survivability

You can’t predict when an earthquake might occur, but you can take these steps to protect yourself at work and home:

- Identify the most structurally secure areas of your workplace and home. These are usually spots located away from windows and large moveable objects.
- Commit to memory these secure areas, which include spaces under desks, tables, or benches or door frames on inside walls, and be prepared to use them during an earthquake.
- Many workplaces hold earthquake emergency drills and you should do the same at home with family members if you live in an earthquake zone.
- At work and at home, ensure that you're not sitting or standing in the path of an object such as a large bookcase or filing cabinet, which could tip over and crush you during a strong earthquake. Heavy, tip-prone objects should be bolted or wired tightly to walls. Never hang mirrors or other heavy objects above where people sit, work or sleep.
- At home, prepare an earthquake emergency kit containing non-perishable food, water, medicine, first aid supplies, batteries, a flashlight, a battery-powered or crank-powered radio, clothing and money.
- Take training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid.

What Should I do During an Earthquake'

- Immediately take cover under a heavy object such as a desk and place your hands over your head. Brace yourself using your feet. Don't try to run outside, where you might be struck by falling debris or power lines.
- If you're outside when an earthquake strikes, move to an open area away from buildings, trees and power lines.
- If you're near an ocean beach where a strong earthquake may have generated a tsunami, quickly move to higher ground.
- Stay away from elevators during an earthquake, but if you're inside one, press the buttons for all floors and

get out as quickly as possible.

- If you’re in your car or work vehicle, pull over away from bridges, overpasses and buildings. Stay in your vehicle until the quake ends.
- If you’re in a crowded space, stay away from doors. People may panic and bolt, rampling others.

What to do Once the Quake Ends

- Rely only on emergency lighting or flashlights. Don’t turn on any other lights, since leaking natural gas lines could cause an explosion.
- Get outside to a clear, open area away from any structures that might suddenly collapse. This area should be designated as part of your employer’s emergency preparedness plan and all workers should know to gather there for a head count.
- Check yourself and others for injuries and call for necessary emergency help.
- Never re-enter a damaged building after an earthquake. It could be weakened and collapse without warning hours or days later.
- Expect aftershocks in the hours and days following an earthquake.

Conclusion

If you live in an earthquake-prone area, you can’t be nonchalant about your safety. Planning is critical in dramatically boosting your odds of surviving a strong earthquake.