

# Earthquakes and Other Disasters



## A Handbook for Seniors on Emergency/Survival Preparedness



Provided as a service to the Senior Citizens of California by The California Association of Area Agencies on Aging

- **PURIFY** the water, if you are suspicious of your water source.
  - If your power or gas supply is OK, or if you have a camp stove, boil the water for 3-5 minutes.
  - Water purification tablets, such as those sold in drug stores and camping supply houses, also can be used.
  - Household bleach with no additives (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) can be used as a third alternative. Use 4 drops of bleach for every quart of water, ¼ teaspoon for 1 gallon, or 1 teaspoon for 5 gallons. Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for ½ hour before using.
- Don't overlook "hidden" water supplies: melted ice cubes, juices packed along with canned foods.

### **YOUR HOME**

The earthquake or disaster may have caused damage to your home and its contents. Some damage may not be visible.

- Have a neighbor, friend or family member **check for gas and water leaks**, if you cannot do it.
- Determine if damage to your home is minor or serious. If you are not sure about the safety of your home, do not live in it until you have had professional advice about the safety of your home. Stay with neighbors, friends or family members.
- If you have home owner's insurance or earthquake insurance, report damage to your insurance agent as soon as possible.
- Once your area has been declared a federal emergency area, **contact the local Federal Emergency Management Agency's Disaster Application Center** to see if you are

eligible to receive financial assistance. Take a friend or relative with you to help answer questions and fill in paper work. When you fill out an application, you will receive a control number. Use that number for all other transactions related to the disaster.

- If damage is superficial and you have no gas leaks, you can start cleaning up damaged contents. Broken glass and spilled household chemicals such as bleach, ammonia and paint thinner should be cleaned up first. **Do not throw away** any broken household items until they are released by the insurance agent and/or FEMA inspector.
- **Wear shoes** immediately after the earthquake and while cleaning up spills.
- To clean up broken glass, **use a dust pan and brush**. Place glass in a solid cardboard box or garbage can. After the glass is cleaned up, **vacuum in the area** when the electricity comes back on in order to pick up remaining splinters.
- As a final step, put on **heavy gloves** and use a wet paper towel to pick up any tiny shards that may have been missed by the vacuum cleaner.
- Clean up other spills by mopping up with paper towels or old rags. Use rubber gloves during the process.
- **Have your chimney checked** for damages, such as cracks and loose bricks, before you use your fireplace.

## Damage Repair Following the Disaster

Many homes suffer damage during an earthquake disaster that require professional assistance to repair or rebuild. Home repair and improvement projects provide scam artists opportunities to make money from other people's loss and suffering.

Before you hire a contractor or sign a contract for home repair, review the following do's and don'ts.

- **DON'T** rush into repairs, no matter how badly they are needed!
- **DON'T** hire the first contractor that comes along. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tend to attract unlicensed and unscrupulous contractors who solicit door-to-door asking for large down payments. Many never return to do the work. This happened to many homeowner victims following the October 1, 1987, Whittier and October 17, 1989, Loma Prieta earthquakes in California.
- **DON'T** be victimized by someone making a door-to-door presentation, offering to do repair jobs or home improvement on-the-spot and requiring a cash deposit. An enterprising contractor may take the door-to-door sales approach. **HOWEVER**, even on the smallest job, you must **get proof** that the person you are dealing with has a **contractor's license** in the trade for which you expect to have the work done. Get a written contract that contains all the details of the job to be performed.

## FOOD

Foods normally under refrigeration will spoil very quickly.

- Milk, meats and eggs should not be used if warm.
  - If still cold, cook first, just to be sure.
- Frozen foods will last a couple of days without power, if the freezer is not opened frequently.
- Beware of cans that have become dented, or are leaking.
- Check for broken glass or spillage, which may render foods inedible.
- When in doubt, throw it out—it just isn't worth getting food poisoning.

## WATER

If there is a break in the water main (you'll lose water pressure), or in any of your water pipes, your water supply could become contaminated.

- Turn off the water supply to your home.
- Do not drink or wash with tap water until you are told it is safe to do so.
- Your household water heater tank can supply 30-60 gallons of emergency water.
  - You should turn off the electricity or gas to the water heater before draining the water.
- Toilet reservoir tanks are another supply of water, as long as no disinfectants are used in the tanks.

## NATURAL GAS

Gas lines can break or crack, causing leaks. Check for gas leaks with a neighbor, friend or family member. You may not smell the gas leaking. The **sense of smell** becomes less acute with aging.

Or, is the damage to your home so severe, you suspect the gas lines may be broken? If so:

- Do not turn on lights, use electric switches, light matches, use candles or kerosene lamps, until the gas lines have been checked by you, a friend, neighbor or family member.
- Once the gas has been turned off, only the gas company can SAFELY turn it back on.

**NOTES:** Location of your utility shut offs:

Gas \_\_\_\_\_

Water \_\_\_\_\_

Electricity \_\_\_\_\_

## SEWER LINES

Suspect sewer problems if water lines are damaged.

- Do not use toilet facilities or dump waste into sink or bathroom drains.
- Use large, waterproof, garbage bags as liners for toilets.
  - Household disinfectants can be used for odor control.
  - Seal tightly when full, and dispose of when told the sewage system has been repaired.
- Camp toilets, RV toilets and porta-potties also can be used.

- **DO** deal only with licensed contractors. Consumers have very little, if any recourse against unlicensed contractors. Be sure the contractor has Workers Compensation and Liability Insurance coverage. Also, check the status of the contractor's bond with the California Contractor's State License Board.
- **DO** ask to see the contractor's "pocket license" or Home Improvement Sales (HIS) registration. All contractors are issued pocket licenses which show the type of trade for which they are licensed and the expiration date of the license. If three or more types of work are required, the work should be done by a general building contractor.
- **DO** ask to see some additional form of identification if the person says he or she is representing a contractor. If the representative can't show you a contractor's license or Home Improvement Sales registration, call the contractor and find out if the person you are dealing with is authorized to act on behalf of the contractor.
- **DO** call the Contractors Board to verify the information provided by the bidding contractor or salesperson, including the name on the license, is correct. Find out if the person you are dealing with is a legitimate representative of a licensed contractor with a clean record.
- **DO** get 3 bids and ask for references of work the contractor has completed in the local area.

- **DO** contact the consumer references and ask questions that will help you decide whether the contractor you are considering will satisfy your needs. This takes time, but saves money and aggravation in the long run.
- **DON'T pay cash and don't pay the full cost of the job up-front.** Under state law, when undertaking a home improvement or repair job, contractors cannot ask for a deposit of more than 10% of the total cost of the job or \$1,000.00 whichever is less, unless the contractor provides a bond, approved bond equivalent, or approved joint control ensuring completion of your contract. Any such bond is in addition to the bond required of all contractors for licensure.
- **DO require a written contract** with the contractor's license number on it, and don't sign until you fully understand the terms. Include everything you have agreed upon; work to be done; start and finish dates; and financial terms. Specify that the contractor is responsible for obtaining lien releases from all sub-contractors and material suppliers. Sign *only the complete contract and retain a copy for your records*. Remember, if it's not in the contract, even with a verbal promise, you may not get the work done by the contractor.
- **DO** ask a family member or friend to review the contract with you before signing.

- You may not feel an emotional reaction to the effects of the earthquake right away. This may happen in a week or two, or even a month after the earthquake. It is important to talk about the earthquake and how it affected you with your neighbors, friends and relatives.
- If necessary, plan emergency survival with neighbors. This can include shared cooking as well as shared outdoor camping.
- When the initial emergency is over, you can go to the store and restock any emergency supplies that were used.

### **When the Shaking Stops**

After the earthquake, you'll need to decide whether it is better to stay in (or return) to your home, or to remain outside. Common sense will probably dictate the answer. You should, however, be alert for certain dangers.

#### **UTILITIES**

You probably know what it's like to be without *electricity, water, gas or telephone* service for a short time. It's very inconvenient to be without some or all of these services for several days or weeks. This is a common problem after a damaging earthquake or disaster.

- If your phone is out of order, ask someone who may have access to a working phone to let your family or a friend know that you are okay.
- Use a flashlight to get around.
- Use your emergency gas generator for specialized life-support equipment.

## Immediately After the Earthquake

- **Remain calm.** Remember your plan with your neighbors, friends, and/or family members.
- If possible, check for **damaged utilities** and shut them off only if necessary.
- **If you are seriously injured,** lie down in a safe area and **rest** until help comes. If possible, cover yourself with a blanket.
- **First Aid** instructions are available in the front section of the local telephone book.
- **Let neighbors know** that you are okay. You may feel nervous and upset about what happened. This is a natural reaction.
- **Do not use the telephone** to call out unless it is an **emergency.**
- **Don't tie up the phone lines.** If your phone rings, answer it if you can. Be brief. Phone lines frequently become over loaded immediately after a disaster because of unnecessary over use.
- **If your children or friends take you to their home** right after a major earthquake or disaster, be sure to tell your neighbors or leave a note before you leave. **Take your medications** and **emergency supplies** with you.

## Things to Note

### PERMITS

It is the contractor's responsibility to obtain necessary building permits. *Do not do this yourself!*

### INCONVENIENCES

Before work begins, ask your contractor what inconveniences will occur. Plan for them.

### PROBLEMS

*If problems occur,* either during or after construction, contact your contractor. Usually, necessary corrections will be made. Should the contractor not make corrections, you can **file a complaint** in writing with your local Contractors State License Board Office.

For more detailed information, obtain a free copy of **What You Should Know Before You Hire a Contractor**, a complete resource covering all the facts you need when planning for a home repair job, including your legal rights as a consumer.

Pick up a copy at your local office of the Contractors State License Board, or send a mailing label to Contractors State License Board, P.O. Box 26000, Sacramento, CA 95826.

For contractor license and bond information, contact the Contractors State License Board in your area. Phone numbers are listed in the white pages of the telephone book under State Government.

### REMEMBER

- **You** are in charge.
- This is **your** home that needs repairs.
- The money you received from the insurance company and/or the Federal Emergency Management Agency is to repair your home. **DO NOT** spend it elsewhere.
- Repair your home as soon after the earthquake as is reasonable.

## How to Get Additional Help

You may need information and assistance with related concerns, such as:

- Temporary **housing**.
- **Counseling** for grief or stress.
- **Transportation** to stores for replacement items.
- Referrals to special services, such as for senior citizens or for the disabled.
- Contacting your family or friends.

## Organizations Providing Major Assistance

The **American Red Cross** sets up emergency shelters which provide food, shelter and many other forms of aid.

The **Salvation Army** provides emergency assistance including food and clothing.

If the **State and Federal** Governments both declare it a disaster area, the **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** will open Disaster Application Centers in your area. Federal and State agency representatives will be at these centers to help you apply for federal disaster assistance. You can apply for assistance if you have suffered losses from a major earthquake or disaster.

## What to do During and After an Earthquake

### When the Shaking Starts

#### **FIND a safe spot.**

The general rule is to duck, cover yourself, and hold on. But, **KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS**. You may not be able to move very quickly, or to squeeze yourself under a heavy piece of furniture. **DON'T KILL YOURSELF TRYING TO PROTECT YOURSELF!**

#### **SIMPLE ways to protect yourself:**

- Stay away from windows and hanging items like plants and chandeliers.
- Stand or sit under a supported archway or door frame.
- If you are in a wheelchair, roll under a supported archway or door frame, and set the brake.
- Sit, stand or lean against an inside wall—one away from windows.
- Cover your head with your arms, unless you need to hold on.
- If you have a lap robe, use it to protect your head.
- If you happen to be outside, move away from buildings, windows, and overhead wires.
- Remember: if it is too difficult or risky to move, it's better to sit (or stay sitting) where you are, until the shaking stops.

If you wear glasses or contact lenses, have an **extra pair** with your emergency supplies. Also, have canes available at different locations in your home which can aid you in getting around after a disaster.

Have a **plan with your neighbors**, so you can let them know that you are all right or need help. Arrange to put up some type of signal, such as a white towel, which they know means that you are okay.

## Other Things You May Need

### For Cooking:

- Barbecue, camp stove, chafing dish
- Fuel for cooking—such as charcoal, camp stove fuel and others
- Matches
- Knives, forks and spoons
- Tin plate
- Paper towels
- Heavy duty aluminum foil

### For Safety and Comfort:

- Sturdy shoes
- Heavy gloves for clearing debris
- Newspaper to wrap garbage and waste
- Spare cane
- Large trash cans

### If You Leave Home:

- Change of clothing
- Towel and wash cloth
- Shampoo
- Toothpaste and toothbrush
- Toilet paper
- Medications
- Emergency supplies

**Supplies Needed:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Both the American Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency centers usually are located in buildings in the areas of heaviest damage. They may be able to help in filling out forms, counseling and making referrals to other resources.

Some excellent brochures are available on things to do to ensure your personal safety during an earthquake, tornado, hurricane and flood. Some sources can be obtained by contacting your state or **local Office of Emergency Services**.

## Local Groups that Can Help

Local churches and other community organizations such as **Area Agencies on Aging, Senior Centers, Offices on Aging, County Social Services Agencies** and **Health Departments** may offer assistance. While some services are church-sponsored, they are open to anyone needing help.

These church organizations may form an **“interfaith committee”** to help victims with their housing and other needs. Again, these services are provided regardless of your religious faith.

Local civic and service clubs in most communities provide substantial help to local people after a disaster.

**REMEMBER:** After an earthquake or disaster, if you are having trouble with making decisions or with sleeping, you are not alone.

It is important to talk about your feelings with someone who will understand and can help. Emergency health and counseling programs usually are made available following a disaster.

These services help people recover from an extraordinary and painful experience. Such services can help you understand what you or your family members might be feeling at this difficult time.

## Local Agencies and Organizations

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

## Special Needs

If you use **life-support equipment**, such as oxygen, have someone fasten the large tank securely to prevent it from falling over in a disaster.

If you use a wheelchair, walker, crutches, canes or other types of **mechanical walking aids**, keep them near you at all times. If possible, have extra aids, such as canes, available in different locations throughout your home.

Place a **security light** in each room. These lights plug into any electrical wall outlet and light up automatically if there is a loss of electricity. They will continue operating automatically for 4 to 6 hours and you can turn them on and off by hand in an emergency. (Available in many hardware stores.)

Have a **whistle** available which can be used to call for help in an emergency.

If you use battery-operated equipment, have **extra batteries** available and replace them yearly.

If your **life-support equipment** requires electricity, purchasing an emergency generator is recommended.

If you use a hearing aid, keep an extra supply of **batteries** with your emergency supplies. Remember to check them regularly.

Have a **smoke detector** and fire alarm system installed. If you have some difficulty hearing, install the system that has flashing strobe lights to get your attention. If you have a battery operated detector, replace batteries yearly.

## Emergency Supplies

*When preparing for an earthquake or disaster store 3 days' supplies.*

- First aid kit: assorted bandages, an antiseptic, roll of gauze and gauze pads, scissors, and non-prescription medications
- 3 gallons of water per person and/or purification tablets or bleach
- 3 days' supply of canned foods: don't forget to include soups, juices and dried fruits
- Manual (not electric) can opener
- Blankets
- Portable radio and extra batteries
- Flashlight and spare batteries and bulbs
- 2 weeks' supply of medication
- List of medications and when they should be taken
- List of doctors and others to notify in case of an emergency (relatives and friends)
- An extra pair of glasses
- Spare battery for hearing aid
- Pets: food, water and leash
- Extra set of house and car keys
- Disinfectant, bleach, soap
- Multi-purpose fire extinguisher labeled A-B-C
- Some cash to purchase emergency supplies until banks can reopen.
- Crescent wrench and other tools

## Personal Forms to Assist Disaster Victims

**WATER:**

- Store at least 3 gallons of water.
- Use gallon-sized plastic containers, similar to the ones found in stores.
  - Those with arthritis may prefer to use lighter, quart-sized containers.
- Commercially packaged water, and water you've disinfected with bleach, can be safely stored for 1 year.

**MEDICATION and other necessities:**

- Store AT LEAST one week's supply of your medications with your emergency food supply. If you can, store two weeks' worth.
  - Use or replace this medication on a yearly basis (unless expiration dates indicate otherwise).
- Store a battery-powered radio and extra batteries.
- Store a flashlight with extra bulbs and batteries.
- If you wear glasses or a hearing aid, make sure to store an extra pair of glasses and spare batteries.
- If you use a cane, keep a spare near your emergency kit.
- Store an extra set of house and car keys with your emergency supplies.

## Friends and Neighbors

### THE BUDDY system:

- Choose a friend or neighbor, and agree to check on each other after an earthquake or disaster.
  - Try to pick someone within sight of your home—phone lines may be down or circuits busy.
- Swap lists of whom to notify in the event of an injury (doctors, relatives, etc.).
- Swap house and car keys.

## Food, Water and Medication

### FOOD: Prepare at least 3 days' supply.

- Store your food supply in an accessible spot, in a box or plastic container (a clean plastic garbage container with a lid is ideal).
- Do not store foods next to household chemicals or other agents which could cause contamination.
- Choose canned or vacuum-packed foods and juices that can be stored without refrigeration.
- Choose foods you normally like.
  - Take a balanced meal approach.
- Canned foods should be replaced after a year. (If you stored foods you like, you can eat them, and thus, save money!)
- Don't forget to pack a can opener.

## My Personal Information

My Name _____
Address _____
Phone # _____ Social Security # _____
Medicare # _____ Medi-Cal # _____

<b>My Relative</b>	Name _____ Relation _____
	Address _____
	City/State _____ Phone ( ) _____
<b>My Out Of Town Contact</b>	Name _____ Relation _____
	Address _____
	City/State _____ Phone ( ) _____
<b>My Neighbor</b>	Name _____
	Address _____
	Phone _____
<b>My Neighbor</b>	Name _____
	Address _____
	Phone _____

# What to do Before an Earthquake

## Your House

You'd be crazy to brick up your windows to avoid shattering glass during an earthquake. And, removing all your furniture and wall hangings is also out of the question. Being prudent requires a few simple precautions for maximum protection.

**WHERE you usually are, is where you'll probably be during a quake.**

- Make sure your bed and favorite chair—the places where you spend most of your time—are far away enough from windows, bookcases, and other things that could fall on you.

**THE MORE things that can topple, the more likely an injury—and, the more obstacles you'll have to climb over after the quake.**

- When possible, put heavier objects on lower shelves, close to the floor. Top-heavy furniture tends to topple, but “bottom-heavy” furniture is much more stable.
- Heavy, tall furniture can be secured to the wall with brackets and other hardware. If you can't do this yourself, perhaps someone can do it for you.

**KNOW the location of your electrical box, and gas and water shut-off valves.**

- Even if you can't inspect and secure these areas yourself, you can save valuable time by telling friends, neighbors and helpers where to look.

# What is an Earthquake?

## What to Expect

An earthquake is the sudden release of energy when pieces of the earth's crust move against one another. This often occurs along fault lines which reflect zones of weakness in the earth's crust. Movement along these fault lines is horizontal, vertical or a combination of both ways.

A strong earthquake may last from a few seconds to more than a minute, but it feels much longer. You will feel a sensation of tremor or shaking. There also may be a loud rumbling noise associated with the shaking.

The severity of the shaking and the loudness of the noise will depend upon the strength of the earthquake. Small earthquakes may, but do not necessarily, precede large earthquakes.

In a large earthquake, major damage to buildings, roads and bridges, utilities, and telephones will occur over a wide area. It may take days or even weeks to restore services.

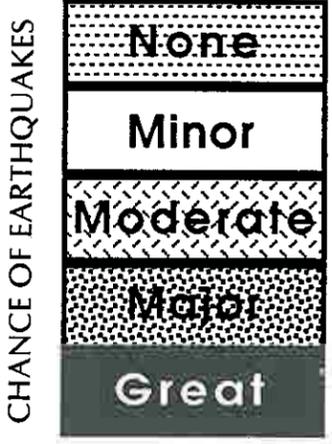
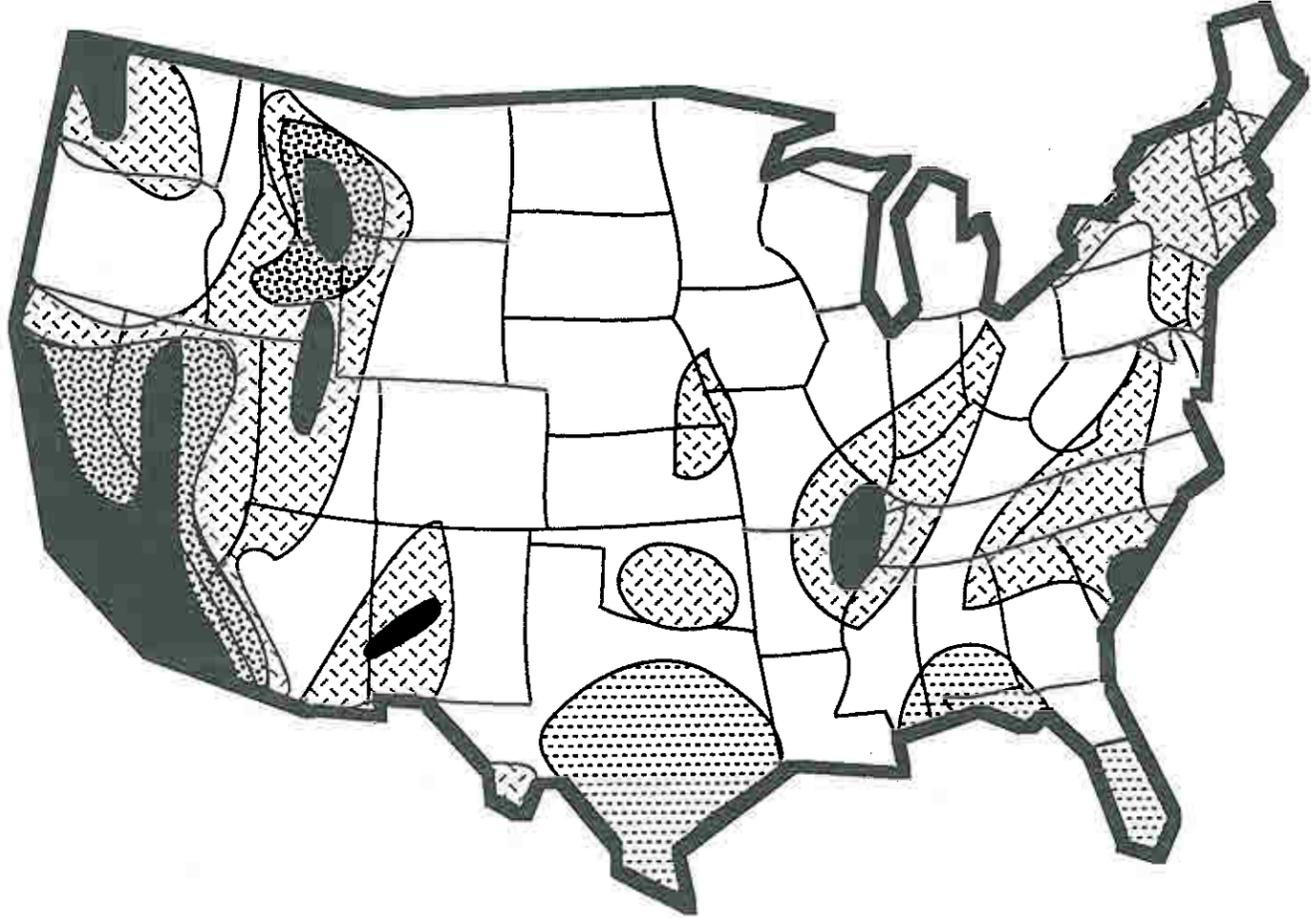
## Aftershocks

When a big earthquake occurs, there are almost always aftershocks which vary in intensity and may cause additional damage after the major earthquake. Aftershocks are smaller earthquakes that happen when the earth underneath the surface adjusts to a new position. You may feel aftershocks for several days, weeks, months, or even years. Over time, they generally grow weaker. Meanwhile, they are a nuisance and can cause continued anxiety and concern.

# My Other Contacts

<b>My Social Worker</b>	Name _____ Address _____ Phone _____
<b>My Helping Agency</b>	Name _____ Address _____ Phone _____ Contact _____
<b>My Religious Affiliation or Clergy</b>	Name _____ Address _____ Phone _____
<b>My Insurance</b>	Company _____ Phone _____ Address _____ Policy # _____ Group # _____
<b>My Attendant Or Care Worker</b>	Name _____ Address _____ Phone _____
	Name _____ Address _____ Phone _____

# EARTHQUAKE RISK MAP



Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1987.

## Coping with an Earthquake

A major earthquake is frightening to experience. It's scary to feel the ground suddenly move under your feet. The aftermath of a disaster is a difficult time. The stress from the earthquake can be a source of anxiety. If you feel confused or depressed, you are not alone. These are normal reactions to any major upset.

You'll start to feel a little better when you know what to expect and what you can do to help yourself. Living with earthquakes does require preparation. On the next few pages, we'll give you some practical information and advice. We'll also suggest where you can get additional help, and provide forms for your use. Taking steps before an earthquake will limit its threat to you and your home. All areas of the state can have natural disasters of one form or another. All counties can potentially have an earthquake. Be prepared wherever you live and when you travel.

## My Medical Information

<b>My Doctor</b>	Name _____
	Address _____
	Phone _____
<b>My Hospital</b>	Name _____
	Address _____ Phone _____
	Policy # _____ Group # _____
	Name _____
	Address _____
	Phone _____

My Medical Or Disability Condition		
Medical Specialists	Hospital/Clinic	Phone #

# Introduction

*How likely* is it that a major earthquake or disaster will strike your community during your lifetime? While most experts say such an event will occur, no one can say WHEN it will happen or HOW BAD it will be. So, what are you supposed to do? Prepare for the best? Prepare for the worst? Just take your chances and not prepare at all? The best answer we can give, and the approach taken by this handbook, is to be prudent.

## The Prudent Approach

### **KNOW your personal limitations.**

- How are your eyesight and your hearing?
- Do you use a cane, walker or wheelchair?
- Do you need to take regular medications?

### **ASSUME that reasonable order will be restored within three days.**

- Within this time frame, governmental and private agencies will have established food, water and medical resources.

### **TAKE a low-cost approach to preparedness.**

- It doesn't make sense to spend money on luxury items, just ones critical to your survival.

### **CREATE a preparedness plan that does not intrude into your normal life.**

- A disaster may be possible, but it is still UNLIKELY. You won't be comfortable day-to-day if you try to turn your house into a "quake-proof" shelter.

### **DEVELOP a simple plan—one that is easy to remember and follow.**

# My Medication List

	Name Of My Medication And Dosage Size	Reason For Taking It		When To Take It
<b>1</b>				
	Dr.:	Prescription #:	Pharmacy:	
<b>2</b>				
	Dr.:	Prescription #:	Pharmacy:	
<b>3</b>				
	Dr.:	Prescription #:	Pharmacy:	
<b>4</b>				
	Dr.:	Prescription #:	Pharmacy:	
<b>5</b>				
	Dr.:	Prescription #:	Pharmacy:	
<b>6</b>				
	Dr.:	Prescription #:	Pharmacy:	
<b>7</b>				
	Dr.:	Prescription #:	Pharmacy:	
<b>8</b>				
	Dr.:	Prescription #:	Pharmacy:	

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## Foreword

In 1993, the California Department of Aging requested the California Association of Area Agencies on Aging (C4A) develop and distribute statewide a handbook for seniors on emergency preparedness. The content of this handbook represents information that was drawn from two major sources: "Earthquake Survival Guide for Seniors" prepared in 1991 by the Santa Clara Health Department and the Bay Area Regional Earthquake Preparedness Project—a project of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services; and "Earthquake: A Survival/Preparedness Guide for Seniors" prepared in 1992 by the San Diego Area Agency on Aging, through funding from Meals On The Move. The forms were adapted from "My Emergency Plan and Information Packet" created by Salvation Army Senior Meals Activities Program, San Francisco County. The cover photo was taken by Cheryle Easter, photographer for the *Times Standard* newspaper. It appeared in *The Humboldt Historian*, vol. 41, no. 2, 1993, and captures the destruction suffered in the wake of the 7.1 trembler in Ferndale, California, April 1992.

We thank the California Department of Aging for enabling the C4A to provide a uniform handbook for use statewide. We encourage the reproduction of this document.

Colleen House, President  
California Association of Area Agencies on Aging