

Ask an Expert: Tips for Earthquake Readiness

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With the recent earthquake near Salt Lake City, many people are wondering how they can be prepared if there are more to come.

Aftershocks following the initial earthquake may occur for hours, days or even months. Earthquakes cannot be predicted — although scientists are working on it. Hundreds to thousands of people could be affected who are relying on their own preparations and each other. Consider these tips to help.

Make a plan for how you are going to communicate with your family after a disaster. Ideas for family emergency communication plans can be found at beready.utah.gov.

Practice, practice, practice. Practice using your communication plan. Practice quickly gathering needed items. Practice the guideline to **drop, cover and hold on** – drop to the ground, cover your head and neck with one hand and get under a desk or table. Then hold on to the desk or table leg with the other hand so it will keep you covered.

Secure large household items that could fall or move. This includes bookcases, flat screen TVs, large mirrors or pictures with glass, water heaters and any other large items that could fall and cause injury or damage.

Consider moving beds or sofas away from windows.

Keep important supplies and documents in a safe and easy-to-locate area.

Plan for the special needs of those in your household, including young children, elderly, pets, those with medical concerns or disabilities, etc.

Be aware of guidelines issued from the Utah Seismic Safety Commission. They can be found at beready.utah.gov.

If you are inside a building during an earthquake:

- Drop, cover and hold on.
- Crawl away from windows.
- Stay where you are until the shaking stops.

If you are outside when an earthquake hits:

- Move away from buildings, streetlights and overhead wires. Once out in the open, drop, cover and hold on.
- If you are driving, bring the car to a stop as quickly and safely as you can, and stay in the vehicle. Again, keeping in mind there may be buildings, trees and overhead utility wires to watch for.

While we may not be able to predict where and when an earthquake might hit again, if we prepare now, we will be able to help ease the trauma to ourselves and those around us.

For additional information, visit the Red Cross website at redcross.org or the Federal Emergency Management Agency at fema.gov.

Below is a home/family checklist of things to do AFTER an earthquake.

- The first thing to check is that you, your family and loved ones are all safe.
- Check water, gas and electrical lines for damage. If any are damaged, shut off the valves. Check for the smell of gas. If you smell it, open all the windows and doors, leave immediately, and report it to the authorities. Look for and extinguish small fires. Eliminate fire hazards. Putting out small fires quickly, using available resources, will prevent them from spreading. Fire is the most common hazard following earthquakes. Leave the gas on at the main valve, unless you smell gas or think it's leaking. It may be weeks or months before professionals can turn gas back on using the correct procedures. Explosions have caused injury and death when homeowners have improperly turned their gas back on by themselves.
- Turn on the radio. Don't use the phone unless it's an emergency.

- Stay out of damaged buildings.
- Be careful around broken glass and debris. Wear boots or sturdy shoes to keep from cutting your feet.
- Be careful of chimneys, as they could fall on you. Inspect the entire length of chimneys carefully for damage. Unnoticed damage could lead to fire or injury from falling debris during an aftershock. Cracks in chimneys can be the cause of a fire years later.
- Examine walls, floor, doors, staircases and windows.
- Stay away from damaged areas in your community.
- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, gasoline or other flammable liquids immediately. Avoid the hazard of a chemical emergency.
- Open closet and cabinet doors cautiously. Contents may have shifted during the shaking and could fall, creating further damage or injury.
- Help neighbors who may be in need. Elderly people, those with disabilities, the people who care for them, or people with larger families may need additional assistance in emergency situations.
- Listen to a portable, battery-operated radio (or television) for updated emergency information and instructions. If the electricity is out, this may be your main source of information. Local radio and local officials will provide the most accurate advice for your particular situation.
- Use battery-powered lanterns or flashlights to inspect your home. Kerosene lanterns, torches, candles and matches may tip over or ignite flammables inside.
- Inspect the entire length of chimneys carefully for damage. Unnoticed damage could lead to fire or injury from falling debris during an aftershock. Cracks in chimneys can be the cause of a fire years later.
- Take pictures of damage to the house and its contents for insurance claims.
- Look for electrical system damage. If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires or if you smell burning insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If you have to step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker, call an electrician first for advice.
- Check for sewage and water line damage. If you suspect sewage lines are damaged, avoid using the toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap. You can obtain safe water from undamaged water heaters or by melting ice cubes.
- Watch for loose plaster, drywall and ceilings that could fall.
- Check food and water supplies and storage items.
- Expect aftershocks, and stay alert for them. Move cars out of the garage and have 72-hour kits in a quick and easy place to grab. Consider keeping them in the car.
- Watch animals closely. Leash dogs and place them in a fenced yard. The behavior of pets may change dramatically after an earthquake. Normally quiet and friendly cats and dogs may become aggressive or defensive.
- Stay calm yourself, and talk to children about safety.
- Register with the American Red Cross that you are safe and well at <https://safeandwell.communityos.org/>

Sources:

Be Ready Utah
American Red Cross
California Seismic Safety
FEMA

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