

BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER AN EMERGENCY

Every community and every neighbourhood has unique hazards that require customized and specific response plans. Earthquakes are a recognized hazard for most of British Columbia. Other notable hazards include major fires, chemical spills and flooding. The first step in planning is to identify the hazards and risks in the community. It is also important to know which utilities, pipelines and major transportation routes are in the area, so that the impact of failure of these lifelines can be anticipated.

BEFORE AN EARTHQUAKE

- Complete individual preparedness plans for individuals and families
- Establish plans for family reunification
- Learn first aid and CPR
- Make it a household project to know the places in the home and workplace that are safe during an earthquake, and places that might be dangerous.
- Hold earthquake drills on a regular basis. Practice will help families to carry out plans more easily during an emergency.
- Know where the utility shut-off valves are located and make sure family members know how to turn them off. (Know the location of neighbours' shut-off valves).

DURING AN EARTHQUAKE

- **Drop-Cover-Hold:** Drop and take cover under a desk, table or chair (or at least cover your head and neck) then hold onto the furniture legs if possible. If this is not possible, drop in the corner with your back against an inside wall and cover your head. Standing in the doorway is not a good idea, because a door could swing shut.
- If inside a house, an apartment building or an office building, stay in-doors unless the building is in danger of collapse; it is the safest place to be.
- Stay away from plate glass windows and exterior walls. Keep clear of tall, top-heavy furniture and other places (such as near cupboards) where things can fall on you.
- Wait for the shaking to stop before moving anywhere. In an apartment or office building, listen for a message from the floor or building warden.
- Do not use an elevator. Use stairs or other exits.
- In a crowd, do not try to run to the exit. Stay in the centre of the room, away from plate glass or tall top-heavy furniture and **drop, cover and hold.**
- If outside, do not try to run into a building unless this is the only refuge from falling debris (such as in a downtown city core). Move to an open area away from power lines, chimneys, walls and trees, and crouch down.
- If in a car, turn on hazard lights and pull to the side of the road. Avoid stopping under an overpass or on a bridge. Turn off the motor, get down on the floor if possible, and ensure everyone in the car covers his or her head. Stay in the car until the shaking stops.

AFTER AN EARTHQUAKE

- Be prepared for aftershocks. **Drop, cover and hold** until all shaking stops
- Use an “explosion-proof” flashlight or a lightstick to look for imminent dangers. Move slowly and deliberately. Look, listen, feel and smell. Do not strike a match, light a fire, or turn on light switches until assured that there are no gas leaks.
- Check for hazards. Always ensure personal safety and the safety of the family.
- Is there the smell or sound of a gas leak? If so, immediately turn off the gas valve at the meter. Ventilate the room if possible.
- ***Warning: Once the gas is turned off, it is never safe to turn it back on. Only qualified personnel can safely turn the gas on.**
- Are electric cords or wires severed or damaged? If so, turn off the electricity at the power main. Disconnect the damaged cords and then turn the electricity back on.
- Is there a water leak? If so, turn off the water at the main shut-off valve.
- Look around the building for cracks and other damage to the foundation, chimney or roof. Evacuate the building if necessary. If evacuating, take along the emergency kit. Leave a note on the door to let people know the individual or family’s status and location.
- Turn on the radio and listen for emergency instructions.
- Make sure all telephone receivers are “on hook”.
- Avoid using the telephone for several hours except in life-threatening emergencies. See Appendix A: Communications Guidelines – Telephones.
- Although not an immediate priority, check on stored chemicals as soon as possible. If they have spilled or their containers have broken, they pose a threat, especially to children and pets, until they are cleaned up.
 - Clean up spilled chemicals with rags or paper towels that can be discarded.
 - If more than one bottle has broken, try to clean up each chemical separately. Place these rags in individual plastic garbage bags and tie them securely. It is difficult to know the reactions that may take place when chemicals are mixed, so it is best to keep them as separate as possible.
 - These individual plastic bags may be put in a larger trash bag and securely closed. Label this bag and store it out of the way until it can be taken to the municipality’s chemical disposal site.