

Not My Fault: Time to ShakeOut before the next North Coast tremor hits

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard
Posted October 10, 2018

Have you ever wanted to be part of a flash mob? I'm inviting you to join one of the largest ever assembled. Participate with more than 50 million people all over the globe in the Great ShakeOut at 10:18 am on October 18th. The great thing about this flash mob is that you don't have to go anywhere to be a part of it. You can join at home, at work, or at play. You can do it alone or with friends, family or coworkers. My preferred Shakeout buddy is my dog.

What you do is really very simple. Pretend the earth starts shaking. You can set an alarm on your phone or watch for 10:18 or listen to KHSU FM 90.5 or another local station broadcasting the drill. DROP down to the floor or ground if you are able to. Staying in one spot is the really important part. Studies of earthquake injuries show the further you move during the shaking, the more likely you are to have something hit you or fall on you – freezing in one spot is your best safety bet. Once you are on the floor, look for hazards such as windows that might break or objects that could fall and slide a few feet to avoid them.

If there is a table or desk nearby, take COVER under it, and HOLD ON to a leg so that you move with it. Nothing to take cover under? Cover your head with your arm and keep yourself as small as possible and stay put. In an auditorium? Slip down between the seats or bend over so your head is below the chair back level. In bed? It's best to just stay put. You can put the pillow over your head. A little planning ahead of time can make a big difference. Consider moving that enormous potted plant on top of the bookshelf right next to your bed, or any other large objects that could fall on you. The only casualty in the 2014 Napa earthquake was caused by a television falling on a sleeping woman.

Not everyone has the mobility to DROP, COVER and HOLD ON. In a wheelchair? Lock your wheels and remain seated until the shaking stops. Protect your head and neck with your arms, a pillow, a book, or whatever is available. Reducing falling hazards in the areas you spend much of your time will make you safer.

Don't head to a doorway. Unless you are in a brick building, the door is no stronger than anywhere else. Moving while the ground is shaking makes you more likely to trip or fall on something or for an object to hit you. The door in the doorframe may swing back and forth and injure you. Some people will inevitably be rushing through the door in a panic and you could be injured in the crush.

Need something to do to keep your mind occupied during the ShakeOut drill? COUNT. Counting will help calm down the adrenalin rush that all of us feel in an earthquake and remember to breathe. Just counting and breathing can help to still the fear that can make you feel ill and, in rare occasions, lead to heart attacks. Children love to count. It gives them something to focus on besides the shaking and most will enjoy loudly leading the count. It's also a way to how big the earthquake is. The longer the shaking lasts, the more likely a tsunami could follow.

If you happen to be in a tsunami zone on October 18th, consider adding an evacuation drill after you Drop, Cover and Hold on. My recommendation, as soon as the ground shaking abates enough so you can safely move, grab your kit (see preparedness tip below) and start walking your pre-planned route to higher ground. The more you drill, the calmer you will be when the real event strikes.

Here's a thought experiment for ShakeOut that you shouldn't actually try. Think about what happens if you are driving when the earthquake occurs. A big earthquake will feel like a blowout. To avoid having an accident, slow down and stop until the shaking has weakened. What if you happen to be in a low area by the coast or bay where a tsunami could follow? Pay attention to your surroundings. Is the road damaged? Has traffic made the road impassable? How far are you from roads heading inland? If the road is still passable, proceed slowly to one of these roads. If you can't drive, leave your car and go on foot. Don't let this scenario prey too much on your mind. The odds that this will happen during the few moments you are vulnerable are much smaller than being hit by a drunk driver.

Register to participate at shakeout.org. This web site is loaded with links for different audiences and has great preparedness materials. No computer access, call the Humboldt Earthquake Education Center at 707/826-6019 and we can contact you. Tied up at 10:18? No worries. Practice your drill at a more convenient time. It still counts. ShakeOut is fun and educational. It will give you

peace of mind knowing that you have taken one important step to protect you and your loved ones and you can tell everyone you were part of one of the largest flash mobs ever.

Preparedness tip of the week: Put together a Grab-n-go emergency kit for work or home. Use a satchel or small backpack and include those essentials that you need to survive for a few days if you only have minutes to leave. On my list are water, medications, extra glasses, a thumb drive with photos of important documents, power bars, rain coat, space blanket, flash light, hand-cranked portable radio and, most important, chocolate. Everyone in your family should have one – children can include a stuffy, game or favorite book.

Lori Dengler, PhD is an emeritus professor of geology at Humboldt State University, and an expert in tsunami and earthquake hazards. Questions or comments about this column, or want a free copy of the preparedness magazine “Living on Shaky Ground”? Leave a message at (707) 826-6019 or email Kamome@humboldt.edu

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