



HOW TO CONDUCT AN EARTHQUAKE DRILL

A guide to plan, conduct, and evaluate
an earthquake drill at your church



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BEFORE THE DRILL

Why Should We Conduct Earthquake Drills?

“All 50 states and five U.S. territories are at some risk for earthquakes. The risk is higher in identified seismic zones including the San Andreas Fault in California, the Cascadia Subduction Zone in western Oregon and Washington and Alaska, the New Madrid Fault Zone spanning areas in Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky, and areas on the east coast including the mid-Atlantic, coastal South Carolina and New England.”—Ready.gov on Earthquakes

Earthquakes occur when the tectonic plates that form the Earth’s surface move over, under and past each other. This causes a sudden, rapid shaking due to the shifting and breaking of rocks beneath the Earth’s surface. Annually, 70–75 earthquakes occur worldwide that cause major damage to building infrastructures and homes and include loss of life.

The typical damage caused by earthquakes includes collapsed buildings, bridges, and highway overpasses; disruption of gas, electrical, and phone service; damaged homes and roadways; landslides, avalanches, flash floods, fires, and tsunamis in locations near the ocean.

If you are unsure of the earthquake risk for your area, contact your local emergency management office, American Red Cross chapter, state geological survey or department of natural resources.

Here’s your planning checklist:

- Review your written Emergency Plan.
- Include the following individuals in a discussion and approval process for conducting the drill: your pastor, church board, safety committee, and Sabbath School teachers.
- Create a crisis response team. Include individuals who have law enforcement, military, or medical training. Designate duties so everyone knows what their tasks will be in an emergency. These can include:
 - ▶ Directing congregants to safe areas in the building—any place that is strong and sturdy. Make sure to point out these areas beforehand to the congregation.

- ▶ Assisting congregants with limited mobility and children in evacuating. Remember guests may be present who don’t know the emergency procedure.
 - ▶ Reuniting children with parents following the earthquake.
 - ▶ Assisting anyone who may be trapped or too frightened to move themselves to safety.
 - ▶ Follow-up after the crisis in assuring everyone is secure.
 - ▶ Checking the facility after the earthquake to determine damage, whether utilities need to be shut off, treating injuries, reuniting family members, etc.
- Designate one of your church leaders to meet with the police and review their strategy for responding to an earthquake in your area. You can also give them the date you choose to conduct the drill.
 - Share educational resources with the congregation before the drill takes place to prepare them with precise information on what to do during the drill. This can include where to move away from, and where to move to as well as **Drop, Cover, and Hold On** protocol from FEMA.
 - Assign individuals to observe the drill and report back any problems they noted.

PREPARING YOUR CHURCH BUILDING

- Secure bookcases, file cabinets, and other large office furniture to the walls.
- Secure computers, audio-visual equipment, television/computer monitors, water heaters,

refrigerators, etc. Any items in danger of falling should be secured.

- Store any flammable products, landscaping chemicals and cleaning supplies to prevent spillage.
- Brace all overhead light fixtures. These are often the most common items to fall and cause injury.
- Bolt all gas appliances to the floor.
- Are the pipe fittings in your facility made of flexible materials? These are less likely to break, preventing gas and water leaks.

- Check the building for ceiling or foundation cracks, and repair small cracks to avoid major ruptures in the event of an earthquake.
- Ensure someone is assigned to turn off water, electricity, and gas mains if leaks occur and that they know the location of the utility shutoffs. Only turn off gas mains if there is a leak. A professional must be used to turn the gas back on.
- Store necessary tools near each of the shut-off locations.
- Test smoke detectors monthly to make sure they are working properly. If a detector is more than ten years old, replace it.



CONDUCTING THE DRILL

Announce to the congregation a week or two before the drill of your intent to conduct an earthquake drill. Tell them when the drill will take place, and what is expected of them. This is especially important if this will be the first drill. Unannounced drills should only be performed once the congregation is comfortable with what to do when the alarm sounds.

EDUCATE YOUR CONGREGATION

1. Remind the alarm monitoring company or fire department of your drill.
2. Have a designated person from your crisis response team walk to the front and announce to the congregation that an earthquake drill is now in progress, and share the following:

"We request that everyone take part in this Fire Drill and follow emergency evacuation procedures. Your participation and cooperation will help ensure that our plan is safe and workable and that everyone knows what to do in case of an emergency. Please remain calm and make space for those in wheelchairs and anyone needing special assistance as we all evacuate to our church's designated area."

Start your timer to evaluate how long it takes to clear the building.

3. Have members of your crisis response team assist congregants to the appropriate safe areas and watch and assist those needing assistance.
4. Have a designated member of your crisis response team sweep the building to be sure all are in a safe location.
5. Wait until everyone is in a safe location. Stop the timer. The first drill will take longer because it is new to everyone. As you practice and conduct more drills, response time will decrease.
6. Allow the congregation to return to their seats.



AFTER THE DRILL



- Ask for feedback from the congregation and those who assisted with the drill.
- Identify problems and weaknesses.
- Make notes of what went well and what didn't. Your record should include:
 - ▶ *The date and time of the drill.*
 - ▶ *The name of the person who conducted the drill.*
 - ▶ *The elapsed time required to vacate the facility.*
 - ▶ *Notes and observations regarding problems with the drill or areas of needed improvement.*

Maintaining records and other notes will provide you with the benefit of information gleaned from past events.

- After reviewing all notes, revise your emergency response plan as needed. Don't forget to set the date of your next drill!

When you begin to have drills, it is best to schedule additional drills three or four drills in the first year. After the congregation is comfortable with the procedure, yearly drills are sufficient. Remember to vary the time of the drills. Schedule them before, during, and after Sabbath School, the announcement period, and during the worship service. You might plan one for a midweek service at night. Emergency situations can happen at any time, so be prepared.

ARM CARES CHURCH EMERGENCY PLANNING RESOURCES

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