

Preparing your home for the next earthquake needn't leave you rattled

Saturday, March 2, 2002

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It's been a year since we dove for cover, perhaps heard glass break in our kitchens, or arrived home to find lamps on the floor and cracks in the walls.

Shortly after the Nisqually earthquake Feb. 28 of last year, it seemed like more of a priority to stow glassware in a safer place, perhaps put better latches on cupboards and check downstairs to make certain our foundations were quake-ready.

But like New Year's resolutions, earthquake preparedness probably got lost in daily shuffles. And while it might take weeks to complete a retrofit, there are dozens of small things that can be done today that will minimize damage to your home, and make it safer for family and pets.

Start small. Put a flashlight beside your bed along with a pair of sturdy shoes.

See how simple this can be?

Take a walk around. Make a list of tall things that could topple -- floor lamps, a lamp or television set on a flimsy table or high shelf, for example. Figure out how to anchor the top-heavy items, and clear out a lower cupboard for fragile glass items.

If it's glass and you'd hate to lose it, anchor it down, pen it up, or pack it off to safety. Hardware stores have something called Quake Hold, a putty-like anchoring substance, in two formulas: A clear one for use with glassware on glass shelves; another for wood shelves.

Earthquake expert Roger Faris knows people object to ugly hardware, but he says manufacturers have come out with some attractive alternatives for strapping and securing large pieces. Professional bolters and strappers can be found under Earthquake Services and Supplies in the Yellow Pages.

Items such as dishes can be penned in by installing sturdy latches on cupboards. If you have a china cabinet with glass doors, or an etagere displaying figurines, for example, use Quake Hold to secure items inside, then bolt the cabinets to wall studs.

Foods in bottles and jars should be moved to low shelves, or into kitchen cabinets that have latches or

bolts. If doors stay closed, objects are less likely to break.

Check the bedrooms. If there's art hanging over the bed, move it or bolt it to the wall. That work of art under glass could act like an ax. Framed pieces hung from a single nail or hook are not secured. Spread the weight between two hooks or nails, and glue a small piece of Velcro at the bottom of the frame with a matching tab on the wall. This will prevent the picture or mirror from swinging when the walls start moving.

The hot water tank, like a tall refrigerator, needs to be secured to studs. The water it contains could be your best friend during a disaster. So strap it or bolt it. Think of it as about 60 gallons of clean water that could be used if main water lines were ruptured.

Check your home in advance for the safest places to "drop, cover and hold on," staying away from windows. If you're in bed, stay there and put a pillow over your head --just in case you neglected to secure things hanging on nearby walls or a ceiling light is swaying.

If traveling by car when a quake hits, Red Cross directions say "slow down and drive to a clear place" -- away from buildings, trees and power lines. And stay in the car.

A neighborhood response

City of Seattle neighborhoods can get ready for a quake or other disaster by forming a SDART (pronounced "start") group. That's short for Seattle Disaster Aid & Response Teams.

LuAn Johnson, strategic adviser for SDART, says it takes about 25-30 contiguous houses to make a group.

Her office has a free kit with tips on hosting a "preparedness block meeting project."

Once a meeting is set, SDART will send a volunteer educator to explain how their group can save lives, reduce the severity of injuries and reduce property damage.

Neighbors will learn how to assemble seven response teams: communications, damage assessment, first aid, safety and security, light search and rescue, sheltering and special needs, and block coordinators who coordinate team activities. Each team receives a simple, one-page task description that outlines its responsibilities.

These teams will keep neighborhoods self-sufficient for up to 72 hours if 911 and other emergency services are overwhelmed.

For information on hosting or scheduling a neighborhood meeting, call 206-233-7123. Johnson says

nearby cities and communities have similar programs. Outside of Seattle, contact a local office of emergency management.

QUAKE BASICS

The American Red Cross recommends disaster kits include the following for home *and* car, but you may want to focus on the first few items in the auto:

- At least 3 gallons of water per person (and don't forget pets). Stored water should be replaced every six months.
- Flashlight
- First-aid kit and essential medications.
- Canned food and manual can opener, especially ready-to-eat canned meats and fruits that you can eat cold or high-energy foods such as peanut butter, granola bars or trail mix. Disposable cups/plates/utensils also are handy. These foods should be replaced once a year.
- Protective clothing, rainwear, bedding, sleeping bags or space blankets.
- A pair of sturdy shoes
- Battery-powered radio and extra batteries.
- Special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members.
- Written instructions for how to turn off gas, electricity and water if authorities advise you to do so. (Remember, you'll need a professional to turn natural gas service back on.)
- Cash or traveler's checks in case banks are closed and ATMs aren't working.

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