

What to do in case of an earthquake

The severe earthquake which struck the San Joaquin Valley in Central California is a reminder that Alaskans also live in an area where earthquakes are possible.

While natural disasters like floods and windstorms are generally predictable and advance warnings can be given, this is not true of earthquakes.

Still, it is possible to make some advance preparations so the impact of the earthquake can be minimized, says the Insurance Information Institute. Here are some suggestions of what to do before an earthquake strikes which are agreed on by most authorities.

*Have a family emergency plan and be sure that at least one member of the family has had first-aid training.

*If you own your own home, verify that it is properly "tied" to the foundation. Extensive damage is often done to homes that shift and slide on the foundation during an earthquake. A contractor can advise you about this, as well as suggest whether lateral bracing of the house walls is feasible.

*Be sure that water heaters and other gas appliances are properly bolted down or supported on the floor or wall.

*Be sure that all members of the family know how to turn off utilities (gas, water and electricity) in an emergency.

*Maintain fresh batteries in a portable radio and have at least one flashlight in good working order.

While no one caught in an earthquake can control the intensity of its effects on the surroundings, it is better to have an advance idea of what you are going to do than attempt to think what to do af-

ter the floor has begun rolling beneath your feet, the Insurance Information Institute suggests.

A few practical suggestions for what to do when an earthquake strikes on which authorities agree:

*If you are inside a building, stay there. Stand in a doorway or get under a heavy table or desk. Stay away from windows or other glass that might shatter.

*In a large store or other public place, almost everyone will try to hurry out, which means that doorways will probably be blocked. Don't add to the jam.

*If you are outside, try to get into an open space, away from buildings that might have falling glass or cornices or chimneys. Keep clear of power lines that might fall. If you are in a car, stop as soon as you safely can and stay inside it.

When the earthquake shocks die away, there are still some active perils that may come. Broken gas lines or appliances may cause a fire, and ruptured water lines can cause extensive damage. Here are some suggestions for what to do after the earthquake that the Insurance Information Institute has found authorities recommend.

*First, check to be sure that no one in the family is injured. Start first aid immediately if injuries are found.

*Check utility lines and appliances for damage. If you smell gas, open the windows and turn off the main gas valve. Do not turn on electric lights or appliances until the gas has dissipated. (They can cause sparks that might ignite the gas.) If electric wires are shorting out, turn off the power.

*Check to see that sewage lines are intact and working before permitting continued flushing of toilets.

*Check chimneys for cracks or other damage before using them.

*Stay off the telephone, except to report actual emergencies. It is not necessary to report an earthquake to the

police or to ask them for details about it.

*Do not spread rumors or go sightseeing. Stay away from beach areas because of the danger of possible tsunamis (seismic sea waves).

*Be prepared for aftershocks, which are usual after earthquakes.

*Use your portable radio to get emergency instructions.