

*As seen in the "Ask the Organizing Expert" Column in the Lake Oswego Review and the West Linn Tidings*

## **Organizing an Earthquake Preparedness Plan**

### **Question: I'm feeling fairly unprepared since watching the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile. How should I organize my own earthquake readiness?**

Ironically my 6<sup>th</sup> grader has been learning about tectonic plates, convergent boundaries, and all things earthquake related. In fact, his assignment this week was to evaluate his family's Earthquake Preparedness Plan (as if we had one!) and make suggestions based on what he's learned. And considering the Pacific Northwest sits on a spider web of fault lines...well, these were reasons enough to get our own plan in order, and for me to share what we learned with you.

There seem to be two primary components to any good disaster strategy: **the plan and the kit**. The plan should include actions before, during and after the event, as well as a means to communicate with immediate, local and long distance family. The kit should contain basics for survival – food, water and simple shelter; as well as first aid supplies and myriad other items to keep you safe and comfortable.

**The Plan:** Make a plan with your entire family! This can take as little as ten minutes, and simply discussing the subject will increase your odds of survival. What will you do if the earthquake hits while you're at home? Do you have an evacuation plan? Have you identified two exits from each room? Does everyone know to "drop, cover and hold" until the shaking stops? Do you know to avoid doorways, tall furniture, and windows?

When the shaking subsides, does your family have an outdoor meeting place? Who will secure the pets? Does everyone have a flashlight and sturdy shoes by their bedside (broken glass is hazardous post-earthquake).

Once you're safe and accounted for, check for water and gas leaks. Small fires can break out, too. Who will turn off gas, electricity and water, if needed?

How will your plan differ if you're at work and school? Who will pick up whom? Do you have an alternate route home in case roads or bridges are out?

Communication will be important after an earthquake. Cell phones, texting, land lines and computers may or may not work. Sometimes when local phone lines are down, long distance lines will be open. Do you have an out-of-state contact to coordinate communication? Your child's school should also have this number.

**The Kit:** A well-stocked emergency kit can be the difference between life and death. Choose a large, sturdy, water tight bin for your supplies and keep it in an easily accessible spot. At the very least stock a three-day supply of food and water for each person – non-perishable, high protein/high energy foods (power bars, tuna, canned meat) and one gallon of water per person/per day. In addition, a good first aid kit is an absolute. You'll thank yourself for stashing cash in small denominations. Medications, baby supplies, tools, comfort items, warm clothing, rope, tarps, blankets, a battery

operated radio, flashlights, batteries, matches and candles will all prove useful. If you have camping stoves, lanterns, mess kits, tents, and sleeping bags – they can be stored nearby.

Preparing for a disaster is probably on your “I should” list, but recent events certainly suggest this isn’t a luxury. Experts remind us it’s not “if” but “when” we’ll be hit with a devastating earthquake. Try not to let fear or perfectionism get in your way – any preparedness is better than none, so try to do something, *anything!* today. The Oregon Red Cross ([www.oregonredcross.org](http://www.oregonredcross.org)) is a great resource for disaster prep. Their website has loads of checklists, timelines and up-to-date info on everything from earthquakes to terrorist attacks and pandemics.

I’m thankful my son’s science teacher went beyond subduction zones and seismic gaps and assigned such a useful exercise. We had a semi-stocked emergency kit, but certainly hadn’t discussed a plan. It warmed my heart when he said he’d go find his little sister if the earthquake hit at school. We immediately felt better prepared than we had just moments before. Find time this week to start your own disaster plan – I promise you won’t regret it.

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