



Apartment Building Preparedness Activity Guide

Everyone in Berkeley, in buildings large and small, can take important steps towards being safe after a disaster. Choose the activities that work for you, your family, or your building.

5 Minute Activities

Prepare an “OK or “Need Help” Sign

After a disaster you can post an “OK” or “NEED HELP” sign or door hanger in a visible location so your neighbors will know if you need help right away.

TO DO NOW:

- Using a thick marker, create a sign reading “OK” and one reading “NEED HELP” in large, clear letters
- During an earthquake exercise, post the sign on the outside of your door

You can print out a door hanger sign here (created for LA, but works in Berkeley):

http://5steps.la/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/8_5Steps_Toolkit_Emergency_Door_English.pdf

Get in Touch with Your Out-of-Area Contact

After a major disaster, local phone lines may be overloaded. Calls may get through to someone out-of-state when local lines are blocked. An out-of-area family member or friend can be in touch with everyone in your household. This way, you can find each other and know that everyone is safe. Text if possible. Text messages may go through even when phone lines can’t handle voice calls. Texting also keeps phone lines open for 911.

Everyone in the family should know who the Out-of-Area Contact is (and that person should know their role in an emergency) and be prepared to call or text the contact with brief messages including:

- Where you are



- How you are
- What you plan to do next

Spend a few minutes setting up an Out-of-Area Contact now to gain peace of mind for your family in a real emergency!

TO DO NOW:

- Contact your Out-of-Area Contact with a brief message, preferably a text message reminding them that they are your emergency contact.
- Post the Out-of-Area Contact information by every phone in your home.
- Make sure all family members have the phone number in their wallets or backpacks.
- If you do not have a mobile phone to text, or if the mobile doesn't work, get in touch using a landline, pay phone, or any other way you can. Borrow a phone if you need to. There's no way to know which forms of communication will work, so think now about having a variety of options.
- If you do not have an Out-of-Area Contact, now is the time to choose one! Call and/or email the person you think will be best to relay information about you to other members of your family. Explain to them their role in an emergency, and get their agreement. Now send a test message.

Test Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Although landlords are required to provide smoke detectors in every rental unit in Berkeley, it is the tenant's responsibility to replace batteries. Take action to keep your household safe and to prevent small fires from growing into large fires.

TO DO NOW:

- Test smoke and carbon monoxide detectors by pushing the test button on each alarm, or in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations
- Replace batteries in alarms that are not working, or replace the alarm if necessary

FEMA recommends changing batteries in your detectors twice a year: at the beginning and at the end of Daylight Savings Time. Replace your batteries now if



you don't remember the last time the batteries were replaced. If the detectors are more than 4 or 5 years old, now is probably a good time to replace them.

<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/campaigns/smokealarms/alarms/index.shtm>

Fill Empty Freezer Space With Water Bottles

Every time you open your freezer, cold air in empty spaces rushes out. Bottles of frozen water in your freezer will:

- Keep frozen food cold longer in a power outage
- Give you extra drinking water in an emergency
- Make your freezer more efficient all the time

TO DO NOW:

- Fill up some sturdy water bottles with water (leave space at the top for the water to expand)
- Fill any large open spaces in your freezer
- Don't overfill the freezer – leave enough space for air to circulate

Find the Utility Shut-offs for the Building

The Rent Board recommends that all tenants and landlords know where gas, electrical, and water shut-offs are so that they can direct public safety officials in case of an emergency or disaster. In an earthquake, gas lines may be broken, causing hazardous leaks. PG&E advises you to turn off the gas only if you smell gas or suspect a leak, or if there is an active fire nearby.

TO DO NOW:

- Locate gas shut-off for your building
- Locate the water and electrical shut-offs for your building
- Do **not** turn off your gas, water or electricity as part of an exercise
- If you do not know the location of gas, electrical, and water shut-offs, ask your landlord.



<http://www.pge.com/myhome/edusafety/gaselectricsafety/turngasoff/>

30 Minute Activities

Find an Evacuation Route Without Elevators

After an earthquake, elevators may not be usable either due to damage or power outage. Do you know the locations of all of the staircases in the building? Where are the emergency exits that lead outside? Make sure you know where all stairwells end and decide on a meeting location outside.

If there is someone in your household who cannot use the stairs, decide how to evacuate in an emergency. In a life-threatening emergency where rapid evacuation is necessary, family members or neighbors may be able to help a person evacuate. Before attempting to help someone down the stairs ask how they would like to be helped. If the person is unable get downstairs, make sure that those evacuating know that person's location and can report that information to first responders when they arrive.

TO DO NOW:

- Practice meeting together at the front door of your apartment.
- Go to the Fire Exit stairs or Exit Pathway and practice exiting your building and gathering in a safe outdoor space away from buildings and power lines.
- If a family member cannot use the stairs, have them practice going to the safe area. Make sure the person staying behind has a flashlight, whistle and a cell phone to be able to call for help if needed. Practice describing their location and the best way to reach it for when you need to report it to first responders.

Remove Falling Hazards From Over Beds and Play Areas

A simple way to improve the safety in your home is to move anything that could fall on a bed or play area during a quake.



TO DO NOW:

- Walk into each room of your home.
- Imagine the room is picked up by a giant and given a **huge** shake.
- What could fall on the bed or a play area? Heavy furniture, chimneys, vases, mirrors, shelves of books, toys, art, big picture frames, or light fixtures? Move these items or reposition the beds for safety.

Start a Disaster Kit

Starting a disaster kit can be as simple as gathering supplies that you already have on hand in your home.

Do you have any of the following items already? You can start your disaster kit now by collecting them together in a box, plastic bin or duffle bag:

- Copies of important documents such as birth certificates, adoption papers, and insurance papers
- Vaccination and microchip records for pets; extra pet food
- Photocopies of written prescriptions, and if possible, a supply of prescription medications for all family members and pets (3-day minimum, 14-day recommended). Do not put prescription medications in your car or anywhere they can get hot. Keep them in a cool location.
- An extra pair of eye glasses or contact lenses and cleaning solution if you use them
- Solar-powered, hand-crank, or battery operated radio
- Flashlights and batteries
- Something to keep you from getting bored: cards, books, or games
- First Aid Kit
- At least seven days worth of nonperishable food; water in bottles, cans, or pouches
- Plastic bags for trash and sanitary needs
- Work gloves



A more complete list of disaster kit items can be found here:

<http://ncdisaster.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/handbook.pdf>

TO DO NOW:

If you already have any of the above items, put them in your kit. Congratulations, you've just made one huge leap toward disaster preparedness!

Find a Place to Store Your Disaster Supplies

Here are some possible places where a disaster preparedness kit can be stored:

- on your balcony
- under your bed
- in the back of your closet
- in the trunk of your car
- in a garage (see note)

Be sure you can get to your supplies wherever you store them. For example, a garage may not be the best place to store your supplies. Garage doors may get jammed or broken after an earthquake. You may need to put supplies in more than one location.

TO DO NOW:

Choose one or more places where you can safely store disaster supplies. Even if you haven't built up a large kit yet, start by putting a few disaster supplies there.

Do a Home Earthquake Hazard Hunt

Heavy items that can fall, shift or break in an earthquake can be dangerous for your family. A "Hazard Hunt" helps you find hazards and remove them if possible. In many cases, reducing a hazard can be as simple as moving a heavy item from a higher shelf to a lower shelf.

TO DO NOW:



Walk through each room of your home and look for safety hazards. Check for these things:

- Look for heavy items such as water heaters, tall bookshelves, televisions, heavy furniture, and wall hangings that need to be secured.
- Look above beds and play areas for anything heavy that could fall in a quake, including heavy books, glass items, or brick chimneys.
- Are there heavy items that could block exit doors if they fall?

<http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=1666>

<http://www.shakeout.org/downloads/HomeHazardHunt.pdf>

Most leases prohibit tenants from making any alterations without the landlord's written permission. Do not make any holes in the walls or other alterations without written permission from your landlord, as that could violate your lease. A sample letter to your landlord requesting permission to brace heavy furniture can be found here: <http://www.cityofberkeley.info/prepare/activity-guides/>.

Inspect Your Water Heater

An unstrapped water heater could fall over in an earthquake, possibly breaking a gas line or causing flooding. Also, an intact water heater can be a good source of water if broken water lines cut off normal water service.

TO DO NOW:

- If you have access to your water heater, check to see that it is adequately tied back and braced to help prevent tipping over and/or sliding and breaking the gas and water lines.
- If you are not sure the water heater is adequately braced, you can contact your landlord to request that they strap it. Do not strap it yourself without written permission from the landlord, as that could violate your lease. A sample letter requesting that the landlord brace the water heater can be found here: <http://www.cityofberkeley.info/prepare/activity-guides/>



Reduced-cost help with hot water heater strapping is available to Berkeley households from the Community Energy Services Corporation (CESC). See information here <http://ebenergy.org/residential-services/seismic-safety-services/> or call (510) 981-7752.

To learn how to get emergency drinking water from your water heater, visit: <http://www.wikihow.com/Get-Emergency-Drinking-Water-from-a-Water-Heater>

2 Hour Activities

Practice Evacuation as a Group

After an earthquake, elevators may not be usable because of damage to the building or a power outage. Do you know the locations of all of the staircases in the building? Where are the emergency exits that lead outside? Make sure that you know where all stairwells end and decide on a meeting location outside.

If there is anyone in your building who cannot use the stairs, decide on strategies for ensuring that person has an emergency plan. In a life-threatening emergency where rapid evacuation is necessary, family members or neighbors may be able to help a person evacuate. Before attempting to help someone down the stairs ask how they would like to be helped. If the person is unable get downstairs, make sure that those evacuating know that person's location and can report that information to first responders when they arrive.

TO DO NOW:

- Gather participants together and practice leaving the building safely without elevators.
- Go to the Fire Exit stairs or Exit Pathway and practice exiting your building and gathering in a safe outdoor space away from buildings and power lines.
- If anyone cannot use the stairs, have them practice going to the safe area. Make sure the person staying behind has a whistle, flashlight, and cell phone to be able to call for help if needed. Practice describing their location and the best way to reach it for when you need to report it to first responders.

More Tips and Resources for Renters and Apartment Dwellers

- Stay inside your building until the shaking stops. Most injuries during earthquakes occur when people are hit by falling objects when entering or exiting buildings.
- In a large apartment building the safest place in an earthquake is by the central reinforced core of the building, which is usually located by the elevator well.
- Do not use elevators; the power may go out and leave you trapped. If you are in an elevator during an earthquake, hit the button for every floor and get out as soon as you can.
- The fire alarm or sprinklers may go off in an earthquake. Don't be alarmed, but do leave your unit if it's safe to do so.
- Once outside, go to a clear area away from buildings and power lines.
- After earthquakes when the building isn't severely damaged, make sure that you regularly check on neighbors who may have difficulty getting down stairs to ensure that they have the supplies and medication they need.
- Earthquake insurance is not just for owners – renters can get earthquake insurance to pay for possessions, loss of use, and clean-up. Learn more here: <http://www.earthquakeauthority.com/insurancepolicies/renters>
- In Berkeley, the buildings at most risk from earthquake are soft story structures, which usually have an open garage or retail space on the first floor with apartments over it. If you live in a soft story building, contact a Rent Board Housing Counselor at 981-RENT. A list is found here: https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Planning_and_Development/Level_3_-_Building_and_Safety/Soft%20Story%20Inventory%2003-19-2013.pdf

This guide was adapted from 2015 Berkeley Emergency Preparedness Month material which was created by Berkeley CERT Volunteers.