

APPENDIX B—What NOT to do during an earthquake

What rescuers and experts DO NOT recommend you do during an earthquake

Based on years of research about how people are injured or killed during earthquakes, and the experiences of U.S. and international search and rescue teams, these three actions are not recommended to protect yourself during earthquakes:

DO NOT run outside or to other rooms during shaking: The area near the exterior walls of a building is the most dangerous place to be. Windows, facades, and architectural details are often the first parts of the building to collapse. To stay away from this danger zone, stay inside if you are inside and outside if you are outside. Also, shaking can be so strong that you will not be able to move far without falling down, and objects may fall or be thrown at you that you do not expect. Injuries can be avoided if you drop to the ground before the earthquake drops you.

DO NOT stand in a doorway: An enduring earthquake image of California is a collapsed adobe home with the door frame as the only standing part. From this came our belief that a doorway is the safest place to be during an earthquake. True- if you live in an old, unreinforced adobe house or some older wood-frame houses. In modern houses, doorways are no stronger than any other part of the house, and the doorway does not protect you from the most likely source of injury- falling or flying objects. You also may not be able to brace yourself in the door during strong shaking. You are safer under a table.

DO NOT get in the “triangle of life”: In recent years, an e-mail has been circulating which describes an alternative to the long-established “Drop, Cover, and Hold On” advice. The so-called “triangle of life” and some of the other actions recommended in the e-mail are potentially life threatening, and the credibility of the source of these recommendations has been broadly questioned.

The “triangle of life” advice (always get next to a table rather than underneath it) is based on several wrong assumptions:

- buildings always collapse in earthquakes (wrong—especially in developed nations, and flat “pancake” collapse is rare anywhere);
- when buildings collapse they always crush all furniture inside (wrong—people DO survive under furniture or other shelters);
- people can always anticipate how their building might collapse and anticipate the location of survivable void spaces (wrong- the direction of shaking and unique structural aspects of the building make this nearly impossible); and
- during strong shaking people can move to a desired location (wrong- strong shaking can make moving very difficult and dangerous).

Some other recommendations in the “triangle of life” e-mail are also based on wrong assumptions and very hazardous. For example, the recommendation to get out of your car during an earthquake and lie down next to it assumes that there is always an elevated freeway above you that will fall and crush your car. Of course, there are very few elevated freeways, and lying next to your car is very dangerous because the car can move and crush you, and other drivers may not see you on the ground!

Source: [What Not to do During an Earthquake](#), from the University of Washington