



King County

Office of Emergency Management

News Release

Date: March 25, 2011

Contact: Lynne Miller – 206-205-4031

Your first move when the earth shakes: “Drop, Cover, and Hold”

“Triangle of Life” theory dismissed by quake experts

With images of Japan’s devastating earthquake fresh on our minds, so is another round of Internet misinformation about what should be your first move during an earthquake. The King County Office of Emergency Management wants you to know that "Drop, Cover, and Hold" is the best method to protect yourself during an earthquake in the United States, especially in our own quake-prone region.

“Unfortunately, emails have circulated recently, touting the ‘Triangle of Life’ technique, which incorrectly claims that people can use ‘voids’ or ‘empty spaces’ as a way to survive earthquakes,” said Hillman Mitchell, Director of the King County Office of Emergency Management. “Simply put, the technique is not applicable for earthquake experiences in the United States.”

Experts, from medical doctors to international search and rescue teams, agree: "Drop, Cover, and Hold" is your best move to reduce injury and death during an earthquake. Methods like standing in a doorway, running outside, and searching for a potential "triangle of life" are considered dangerous and are not recommended. Here’s why:

- Many injuries from earthquakes are caused from people running around while the ground is shaking. They fall down, run into furniture, step on broken glass, or are hit by falling objects.
- In and around older buildings especially, there is a much higher likelihood of broken windows, falling bricks, and other dangerous debris.
- Despite the urge to flee, experts advise people to stay put – you are more protected indoors under a sturdy desk or table.

- Earthquakes in the U.S. do not typically result in total building collapse ("pancaking") due to high building construction standards.

The "Triangle of Life" theory also encourages people to roll out of bed on to the floor if caught asleep during an earthquake. Again, quake experts agree that staying in bed can provide more protection during an earthquake than rolling onto the floor beside it, where you could be injured by falling objects. Their point is this: the more you move during an earthquake, the more potential there is for injury.

Bill Steele, seismology lab coordinator at the University of Washington, has years of experience studying how earthquakes behave. "The emergency management community has worked for decades researching earthquake response and recovery throughout the world and gathering best practices," said Steele. "We know what works. In the urgency of disaster, people need to instinctively know what to do. And the right message is to 'Drop, Cover, and Hold.'"

Being ready for an earthquake includes practicing what you'll do when the earth shakes so that a safe response becomes automatic. Residents and businesses are encouraged to participate in the statewide earthquake drill on April 20th at 9:45 a.m., or to conduct their own drill at another convenient time.

To learn more about earthquake safety and mitigation, please visit the [King County Office of Emergency Management](#). Help your family, workplace, and community prepare for earthquakes and other disasters: visit www.3days3ways.org.

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King County OEM page on earthquakes:
http://www.kingcounty.gov/safety/prepare/residents_business/Hazards_Disasters/Earthquakes.aspx

3Days, 3Ways emergency planning web site:
<http://www.govlink.org/3days3ways/>