

SETTLEMENTS CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Earthquakes information

Despite their terrible destruction powers, earthquakes are also nature's tool for creation, resulting in some of the world's most breathtaking landscapes such as Africa's Great Rift Valley or the Himalayas in Nepal. The solid ground (earth's crust) we stand on floats on a molten fluid-like substance that is under very high pressure and temperature. In contrast, the crust is rigid and at a much cooler temperature, this results in the inner part of the earth expanding and therefore looking for an exit point to release this pressure. Since the crust is rigid, it is forced to open and in effect causes the large cracks that occur during an earthquake and the mass movements.

Earthquakes occur in three ways;

Continental crush - Two landmasses collide and climb one onto the other creating ranges like the Himalayas (which are still growing) and the Alps.

Continental slide - Occurs when a landmass meets the ocean floor, the heavier ocean floor slides beneath the landmass and a feature known as a trench is formed. The deepest known trench is the Marianas trench in the Western Pacific Ocean.

Continental transformation - Finally, if two continents bypass each other and thus, the general location of a place changes as we know it to exist on the globe. Interestingly, in 16 million years, the North American continent will have moved so far south in relation to the Pacific Ocean, that Los Angeles will be north of San Francisco.

What you should do during an earthquake

Wherever you are keep calm.

While inside,

Stand in a doorway, or crouch under a desk or table away from windows, and glass doors and dividers. In most cities you risk fewer injuries if you remain indoors.

While outside,

Keep away from buildings, windows, trees, and telephone and electrical lines.

On the road,

Drive away from underpasses and overpasses, stop in a safe area, and stay in the vehicle.

Keep a first-aid kit handy and in an easily reachable location - several if possible in different locations to increase the chance of access.

Provide necessary first-aid to persons who may have sustained injuries while awaiting help

To avoid fires do not use matches or electric switches until it is confirmed there are no gas leaks. Use flashlights.

Have a chart that shows where the mains to the power and gas are and know how to turn them off

Avoid consumption of food that may be contaminated by broken glass or chemicals.

Have portable radios as a way of information exchange. This way you will be in a position to receive updates on the disaster.

In many cases the earthquake itself causes minimal damage to human life. Buildings kill people, not the earthquake. Despite the fact that earthquake resistant construction materials and designs are well known, these are often overlooked because of ignorance on the part of the community and weak building regulation enforcement by local authorities.