

Not My Fault: Join the ShakeOut bandwagon

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard

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ShakeOut is Thursday, October 20th, and time to take a few minutes out of your busy schedules to do the right thing when the next earthquake happens. Participating in ShakeOut is the proverbial free lunch. It won't cost you a penny and the muscle memory you develop by responding appropriately to ground shaking will pay off when our next quake strikes.

ShakeOut's primary focus is what to do during earthquake shaking. For more than thirty years, that advice has been to freeze where you are, DROP to the ground, COVER the back of your neck and head with your arm, and, if there is a sturdy desk or table nearby, slide under it and HOLD ON. For most of us that is a pretty easy thing to do.

But DROP, COVER, and HOLD ON is not for everyone and this year, I find myself in that group. I had my second knee replacement on Tuesday and for the next week or so, I am confined to the sofa with my leg elevated. There is no way I can drop to the ground for at least three months.

My immobility won't keep me from being a ShakeOut participant. What should I do when the ground shakes? I can make sure that my bed, sofa and wherever else I find myself parked is as safe as it can be, moving or restraining heavy objects on high shelves nearby. It means strapping/securing bookcases and cupboards to walls. It means latches on cabinets, so items don't fly out.

Even on the sofa or in a chair, there are things I can do. I can still cover my head and neck with my arm or a pillow. The neck is one of the most vulnerable parts of your body. Your cervical spine and all the nerves between your brain and the rest of your body are packed into a small area just beneath the nape of your neck. There's not much muscle here to protect this vital communication corridor. The simple act of raising your arm or lifting a pillow over this area can deflect falling objects, preventing major damage.

I keep my phone on me all the time. It gives MyShake alerts, California's earthquake early warning notification system. I may get a handful of valuable seconds that

shaking may be coming, put the pillow over my head and neck, and brace myself before the strongest seismic waves arrive. My phone gives me emergency county and campus notifications as well. I can use it to alert friends and family that I am fine. If no one hears from me, these same friends can access the 'Find My Phone' feature and track me down.

Query your health care providers and living assistants. Ask them if they are prepared for earthquakes and how they could help you if an earthquake occurred while you were under their care. Are your medications accessible? Do you have emergency power for equipment? As staff change, be sure to ask the newcomers the same questions.

All places provide research opportunities, so I did a little experiment last week while I was in St. Helena. I asked personnel I interacted with if they had any training in earthquake response, if they knew what ShakeOut was, and if ShakeAlert or MyShake had been incorporated into hospital earthquake response plans. I spoke to the pre-op nurses, the anesthesiologist, night nurses, my surgeon, and the hospital chaplain. It wasn't a scientific sample, but I thought the responses were interesting.

The pre-op nurse was a traveling nurse. Many health centers and hospitals rely on skilled nurses that take on temporary assignments for several months at a time. She had no idea what earthquake procedures were in place at the hospital but was sure that the regular staff held drills and training.

Aha – an interesting nugget. Everyone in the staff needs to be part of disaster planning even if they aren't a regular or full-time employee. Earthquakes won't wait to see who is on staff. I'd be particularly concerned about people that don't come from earthquake country and haven't experienced earthquakes or heard our Drop, Cover, and Hold On message.

The rest of the people were very willing to talk about earthquakes. One of the things I like about the St. Helena hospital is how long most of the people have worked there. Many had been in the Napa area in August 2014 when a M6.0 struck just south of the city of Napa. That earthquake killed 1, injured at least 200 and caused half a billion in losses. It was the most damaging Bay Area tremor since the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

But despite their interest, and willingness to recount personal experiences, no one I talked to had heard about ShakeOut. They thought the hospital held drills but couldn't remember when the last one was. Adventist

Health does not show up on the list of health care facilities in Napa County participating in ShakeOut.

I was more surprised that ShakeAlert did not seem to be incorporated into the hospital operating procedures. ShakeAlert is the business/agency version of MyShake, incorporating the few seconds of warning before strong shaking arrives into response plans for public transit systems, utilities, and other critical facilities where seconds of warning can save lives. But such incorporation requires advance planning and understanding of the system.

I was encouraged by the response of my small group of interviewees. They thought it was important to get discussion going and explore further. Since many North Coast folks get their knees and hips in St. Helena, I urge you to carry on the discussion. Maybe next year Adventist Health will show up as a ShakeOut participant.

I am happy to see an increase in ShakeOut participation in the Humboldt County medical sector. As I write, nearly 2000 medical providers and hospital personnel are registered, including St. Joes and Redwood Memorial. Here's a little nudge to Mad River to join the group. If you find yourself undergoing medical or dental care, be outspoken and ask the staff what their earthquake planning includes and what actions they would take if the ground started shaking right now.

Please visit <https://rctwg.humboldt.edu/great-shakeout> to find out how to register and see more tips for people with Access and Functional Needs challenges. Please sign up as an individual or family, business, agency, faith-based group, or any other organization. Knowing I've nudged a few more of you to be aware and prepare will definitely speed up my own recovery.

Lori Dengler is an emeritus professor of geology at Cal Poly Humboldt and an expert in tsunami and earthquake hazards. The opinions expressed are hers and not the Times-Standard's. All Not My Fault columns are archived online at <https://kamome.humboldt.edu/resources> and may be reused for educational purposes. Leave a message at (707) 826-6019 or email rctwg@humboldt.edu for questions and comments about this column, or to request a free copy of the North Coast preparedness magazine "Living on Shaky Ground."