

Not My Fault: ShakeOut 2021 – Hearty toasts and gentle roasts

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard
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The Great ShakeOut is Thursday October 21st at 10:21 AM, a time to pretend an earthquake is occurring. That means dropping to the ground (if you are physically able), covering your head/neck with your arm, and getting under a sturdy table or desk if one is nearby. It is an opportunity for your family, workplace, church, schools, and other organizations to talk emergency preparedness and how to protect those most important to you.

When I was growing up, we were told to get to a doorway when shaking started. There was a reason – the doorframe in a brick structure is often made of wood and wood is much more resilient to ground shaking than brick. I have a number of photos of collapsed brick schools and homes where the doorframe is still intact.

I grew up in Palm Desert and didn't live in a brick building. Research after the Loma Prieta (1989) and Northridge (1994) earthquakes showed that doorways were no stronger than any other part of most buildings and that you were much more likely to be injured if you walked or ran during the shaking. Moving increases the odds of debris hitting you or a bad stumble.

The research also showed that doorways could be hazardous places especially in public buildings. I studied what happened in schools after the Whittier-Narrows earthquake in 1987. At Whittier High, no one was injured in the library where students dove under the tables, but several were hurt when too many people tried to jam into doorways.

I've been involved with ShakeOut planning since 2009. Over 39,000 people in the North Coast region (Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino) registered to participate that first year. We reached a peak in 2018 when about 23% of the population were registered as participants. Not too surprising that our numbers, along with the rest of the state, plummeted last year. Schools have always led the registration tally and with students at home during the pandemic, few registered in 2020.

As of today, the North Coast region registration total is just under 49,000. That's nearly a 25% increase over last year by well below our pre-pandemic average. We've had a lot of other concerns on our plates the past twenty months. But an earthquake is coming, and the preparedness actions you take now will bring you peace of mind.

Just under half of the current regional ShakeOut registrants are students and staff in K-12 schools. School districts have been a major supporter since the first ShakeOut in 2008 and school districts often register at the beginning of each school year. Most schools in our area have signed up but not all. As I write, I can't find any of the Eureka elementary schools of Ferndale schools on the list. You can check to see if the school your children attends is registered at https://www.shakeout.org/california/participant_list.php?year=2021&start=Humboldt&category=schools. If your school is missing, please contact the administrator and explain the importance of participating in ShakeOut and to sign up as participants this week.

Colleges and universities are the second largest group in registration totals. HSU and College of the Redwoods embraced ShakeOut from the beginning, and I toast the successive administrations at both institutions for continuing the tradition. Their efforts are a good model for how businesses and other organizations can use ShakeOut to reach out to staff and clients to improve resilience, from testing emergency notification systems, posting information in common areas (cafeteria, library, bookstore), and making sure the division/department chairs and coordinators participate and disseminate information.

The next toast goes to our healthcare community. The St. Joseph and Open Door Health systems are registered along with several other regional medical groups. But like the K-12 schools, there are a number of long-time participants that haven't signed up yet – including Mad River Hospital and all the Del Norte medical facilities. Many smaller practices, including my own doctor, are also not on the list. And much to my surprise, we've never seen participation from dentists or optometrists.

Fourth on the list is local government. City and County officials have embraced ShakeOut throughout our region from the beginning and I thank the endorsement of County Boards of Supervisors. But our local government buy-in is less than a third of what it was in 2019 with a number of cities (Blue Lake, Arcata, Ferndale) and county divisions not signed up. State government is about the same as in the past, but no federal agencies are signed up including the National Weather Service, Redwood National Park, or BLM.

Sovereign nations play an important role on the North Coast, and I salute the Tolowa Dee-ni Nation and Blue Lake Rancheria as a leaders in resilience and preparedness. This is the 6th consecutive year both have participated. The Yurok Tribe, Bear River, Smith River, and the Trinidad Rancheria have registered in the past and there is still time for all of you to get on board this year.

Some of the groups that could benefit the most from ShakeOut are missing in the current registration tally. The business community and the hospitality industry stand to lose the most in a strong earthquake, especially if people are injured at your establishment. Kudos to Mary Dorman at State Farm in Crescent City who has been with us from the start and six Humboldt businesses. In our entire region there is only one hotel participating and no faith-based organizations. And where are our media folks? A toast to Bicoastal Media in Del Norte and the Times-Standard and a nudge to the rest of you to get on board and help lead the way.

Why the focus on registering? Everyone can participate in the ShakeOut whether or not you are signed up but registering is an important step. It shows that you are committed to the event, and you are a role model for others. There is still time to register and participate. Learn more, including tips for the mobility challenged, at our new ShakeOut website at <https://rctwg.humboldt.edu/great-shakeout>.

I'll be thinking of all of you this Thursday as I join our newest fur family member Pip in my Drop, Cover and Hold On drill.

Lori Dengler is an emeritus professor of geology at Humboldt State University, 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."