

Not My Fault: Cracking the difficult nut of disaster planning

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard
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My preparedness tip last week was to develop an emergency plan. I left you with a reference and a web link. Sounds easy, right?

One of my rules for preparedness tips is that they be something I am doing myself. So far, that's been pretty easy – signing up for emergency notifications, knowing if I am in a tsunami zone, storing water and having a flashlight and whistle. But I have a confession – like many of you, I really don't have much of a plan.

Why is this such a difficult one for me? I know too well that major earthquakes or other disasters can and will happen here and I've seen first-hand their effects elsewhere. Putting together a plan is free, so I can't use the expense excuse. I am also convinced that planning really does make a difference. It reduces injuries, anxiety, and makes you much more comfortable afterwards.

That leaves me with three reasons: I have too many other things to deal with that are "more important", I am not quite sure exactly how to go about it, and, when given a choice, I'd rather spend my time doing something that seems more fun.

I function best when I have deadlines. So today's column is my deadline to bite the bullet and make some progress. My - a little research and leaning on friends and colleagues. I know a number of people who are really good at guiding people in emergency planning.

Dr. Dennis Mileti is a sociologist who studies human behavior in disasters. In the 1990s he did a study of what motivated people to prepare for earthquakes. After an exhaustive series of interviews, he concluded there was only one factor that distinguished people who have developed plans or stored emergency supplies compared to those who hadn't. Talking. Talking to a spouse, roommate or other close confidante about what might happen in an earthquake was the best predictor of taking action.

Linda Nellist coordinates Humboldt County's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program. I asked Linda

how she motivates people to take action. In her CERT classes, she starts with having people identify the reasons why they haven't prepared for emergencies and then list a few simple things they can do to get started. Recognizing that developing an emergency plan is a process, rather than something you have to do all at once is a good way to break down some of the barriers. She also takes an all-hazard approach and doesn't just focus on earthquakes or tsunamis. This and last year's bad fire seasons have made many more people recognize this should be a priority activity.

Judy Warren taught our Living on Shaky Ground classes when she lived in Humboldt County. Now that she is in Oregon, she continues to teach preparedness classes. She starts her presentations with her own "aha" moment - trying on clothes in a San Jose dressing room during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake when the world quite literally collapsed around her. The struggle to find her clothes in total darkness and chaos, getting out of the store where no one had a clue of how to respond and her long walk home, made her vow never to be so vulnerable again.

I have made progress this week. I followed Dennis' advice and had a conversation with my husband about making a plan. It is always best to find a pleasant place for serious conversation. That usually means Brio Café or a walk on the beach. We talked a little about the purpose of a plan – coming up with the steps of what to do in an emergency and how to let loved ones know if we are ok.

I followed Linda's advice in breaking it down into doable chunks. The two top priorities – how to survive and reduce injuries, and how to know to let loved ones know we are ok or vice-versa. As we talked, it turns out we already have many of the elements of a plan. We know to DROP, COVER and HOLD ON in an earthquake and are always aware of how to get to those high dunes when we walk on the beach. But we had not identified an out-of-the-area contact to act as our information conduit in case of emergency. Something to correct this week. And we realized something we hadn't seen on the planning advice sites – we will share the log in information for our Find Your Smart Phones with our contact.

I'll let Judy have the last word, "I continue to find that sensible, but not scary, education is the key to getting folks to buy-in to the concept of disaster preparedness." I'll keep you apprised of my progress.

Preparedness tip: National Preparedness month recommendation is to learn a life-saving skill. You might think first aid or CPR. These are important life-saving

skills and you can look at the Red Cross class list (<https://www.redcross.org/local/california/northern-california-coastal/take-a-class>). Most are now on line so you can take them at your own convenience. But there are other life-saving skills such as practicing how to evacuate to high ground in case of tsunami or knowing how to Drop, Cover and Hold On during an earthquake.

Lori Dengler is an emeritus professor of geology at Humboldt State University, an expert in tsunami and earthquake hazards. Questions or comments about this column, or want a free copy of the preparedness magazine "Living on Shaky Ground"? Leave a message at (707) 826-6019 or email Kamome@humboldt.edu <https://www.times-standard.com/2018/09/12/lori-dengler-cracking-the-difficult-nut-of-disaster-planning/>