

## **Not My Fault: Countdown to ShakeOut 2021**

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard  
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Thursday October 21 at 10:21 AM is ShakeOut. This annual Drop, Cover, Hold On drill is celebrating its 13th year as a Statewide (and now international) event and is held on the third Thursday of October.

I've written about the ShakeOut drill many times. What new is there to say? We are one year closer to the next damaging North Coast earthquake than we were in 2020. Developing the muscle memory to do the right thing when the ground shakes could prevent you, your family, your friends, and co-workers from serious injury. Reducing injuries means a quicker recovery and less economic impact. It's a simple way to lessen the pain.

It's been more than eleven years since we've had a damaging earthquake. On the afternoon of January 9, 2010 a M6.5 earthquake occurred 29 miles offshore of Eureka. We were fortunate that no one died and there were no life-threatening injuries. But there were several hundred minor injuries and nearly \$40 million in damages.

Eight ambulances responded to the Bayshore Mall for injuries caused by shattering glass, falling lights and ceiling tiles, and items crashing off shelves. These were avoidable injuries – if people had just stayed still, or better yet crouched on the ground, they would have been fine. Some people did know what to do. Here's an excerpt from Nicole Bowles' Times-Standard Letter to the Editor, January 13, 2010:

"I am 15 years old and was in the Bayshore Mall food court when it (the earthquake) hit. I immediately remembered what we had been taught since kindergarten, and dove under the table. The floor shook, panels and glass began to fall from the ceiling, and people were running about. People were screaming and running out of the building and dodging falling ceiling panels. I find it odd that the only people who knew what to do were the two high school sophomores."

Many schools regularly hold drills so that school kids like Nicole are more likely to respond correctly than adults. Instead, we let instinct take over and respond like Sophie the dog in the Times-Standard newsroom (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MFzcl-kZHo>).

Sophie and all the Times-Standard staff are exposing themselves to injury. While you are moving, you are more likely to stumble and trip or encounter falling debris.

The most hazardous place to be in an earthquake is between indoors and outdoors – where wires, bricks and ornamental facades may come tumbling down. California's most recent earthquake deaths were in 2003 when two women ran out of a Paso Robles ice cream parlor and were hit by bricks falling from the roof during the M6.6 San Simeon earthquake. The people who stayed inside the older brick structure were unharmed. The 2003 earthquake is also a cautionary tale for business owners. Relatives of the deceased women successfully sued the building owner for failure to retrofit the building, in violation of city and state ordinances. The jury awarded nearly \$2 million to the plaintiffs.

There is a big difference between those past quakes and today. We are in the midst of a pandemic. Our hospitals and medical staff are stretched thin and have less capacity to take on widespread disaster casualties than they did then. You don't want to be one of the people holed up on a stretcher outside of a hospital for hours because there is no place to put you and no one to treat you.

ShakeOut is a win-win exercise. First, it doesn't cost you anything but a few minutes of time on October 21st. At 10:21 AM, pretend the earth starts shaking. DROP down to the floor or ground if you are able to. If there is a table or desk nearby, take COVER under it, and HOLD ON to a leg so that you move with it. Nothing nearby to take cover under? Cover your head with your arm and keep yourself as small as possible and stay put. In an auditorium? Slip down between the seats or bend over so your head is below the chair back level. Studies show the further you move during the shaking, the more likely you are to have something hit or fall on you – freezing in one spot is your best safety bet. If you are indoors don't do what Sophie and the Times-Standard staff did – stay inside.

ShakeOut is good for business. Small businesses run on a very tight profit margin and damage to inventory and injuries to staff and customers could put you out of business. Use ShakeOut as a time to create or review emergency plans with staff and reduce non-structural hazards in your workplace. Train staff to call out DROP, COVER, HOLD ON if an earthquake occurs and to do so

themselves. Keeping your employees and customers safe is not only the right thing to do, but in your best economic interests as well. We are happy to provide you with earthquake preparedness materials to distribute free of cost at your business – just use the contact info below.

ShakeOut can be fun. Take a selfie of your ShakeOut spot. We will be posting them on the Redwood Coast Tsunami Work Group website and Facebook page. Students in the Geoscience capstone class at HSU will be making a ShakeOut panel for Pastels on the Plaza. Do you have other ideas on how to spread the word? Let me know.

How to know when the ShakeOut drill is starting? MyShake, California's earthquake early warning alert, will be sending out a drill message at 10:21 AM. Many counties and cities are using ShakeOut to test their emergency notification system. You need to sign up for MyShake or county alerts to get messages. Some radio stations will also be airing a ShakeOut message. You can also set your own alarm or choose to practice your drill at another more convenient time.

Visit the ShakeOut website <https://www.shakeout.org> to register your participation as an individual, business or other group and find a treasure trove on preparedness information.

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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](mailto: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."