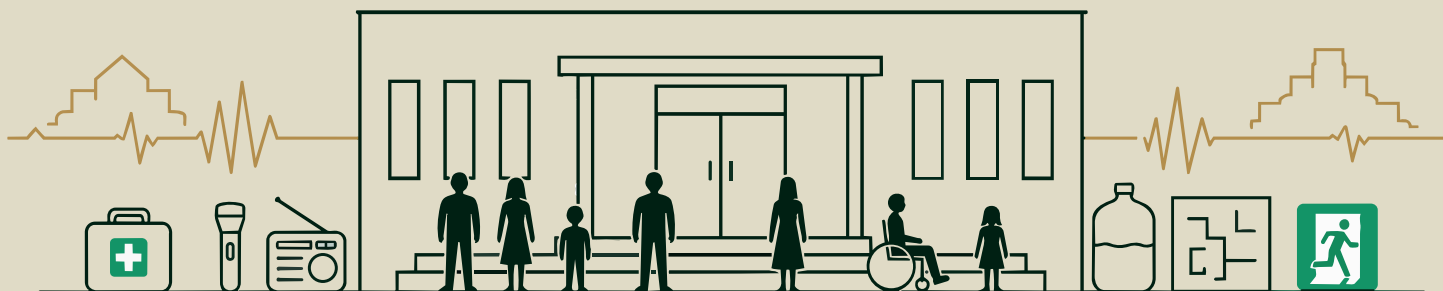




KINGDOM OF PEACE AND JUSTICE CENTER

**Civil Training Program: Risk Management
and Emergency Preparedness**

EARTHQUAKES IN INSTITUTIONS



Educational document for institutions and organizations
in Latin America and the United States

Edition 1 - 2026

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT:
EARTHQUAKES

SPECIAL EDITION: EARTHQUAKES IN INSTITUTIONS

Educational document for institutions and organizations.

| First edition · September 2026

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This guide is intended for institutions and organizations that receive, gather or have people in their care: churches and temples, schools and educational centers, community centers, sports and social clubs, civic associations, foundations and similar organizations.

It is intended for educational and preventive purposes. It does not replace local civil protection regulations, the judgment of the relevant authorities, or the assessment of a qualified professional. Each institution must adapt these recommendations to its building, its activities and the regulations in force in its jurisdiction.

In an emergency, always follow the instructions of the authorities in your country.

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Kingdom of Peace and Justice Center

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SCOPE OF THIS GUIDE

Prevention, organization and protection of people in private institutions and non-governmental organizations

This guide is intended for **private institutions and non-governmental organizations that receive, gather or have people in their care or under their responsibility**, including churches, temples and religious communities; sports and social clubs; civic associations; foundations; community centers; relief organizations; cultural bodies and other similar institutions.

Its aim is to provide practical recommendations so that their leadership, staff in charge, personnel and volunteers can **prepare the premises, organize themselves in advance and act in an orderly way if an earthquake occurs while people are gathered on the site**.

These recommendations are **not intended for municipal, provincial or national agencies, security forces, fire departments, emergency services or other government bodies**, which have their own specific authority, procedures and protocols.

Nor does this guide replace the safety, construction, evacuation, fire protection, accessibility or emergency standards established by the competent authorities. Each institution must adapt these recommendations to the characteristics of its building, its activities, the number and characteristics of the people present, and the regulations in force in its jurisdiction.



PHASE 1: BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE

INSTITUTIONAL PREVENTION, MITIGATION AND PLANNING



Advance preparation is essential in order to reduce injuries, avoid panic and allow an organized response.

When an earthquake occurs during an activity with large numbers of people, a disorderly reaction can create additional risks. Trying to evacuate in haste while the shaking continues can cause falls, pushing, crowding and blocked exits.

For that reason, every institution must prepare with a particularly demanding situation in mind:

What would happen if the earthquake began right now, with the premises occupied and an activity in full swing?



Planning must be done with that situation in mind, and not only for the times when the building is empty or has few people in it.





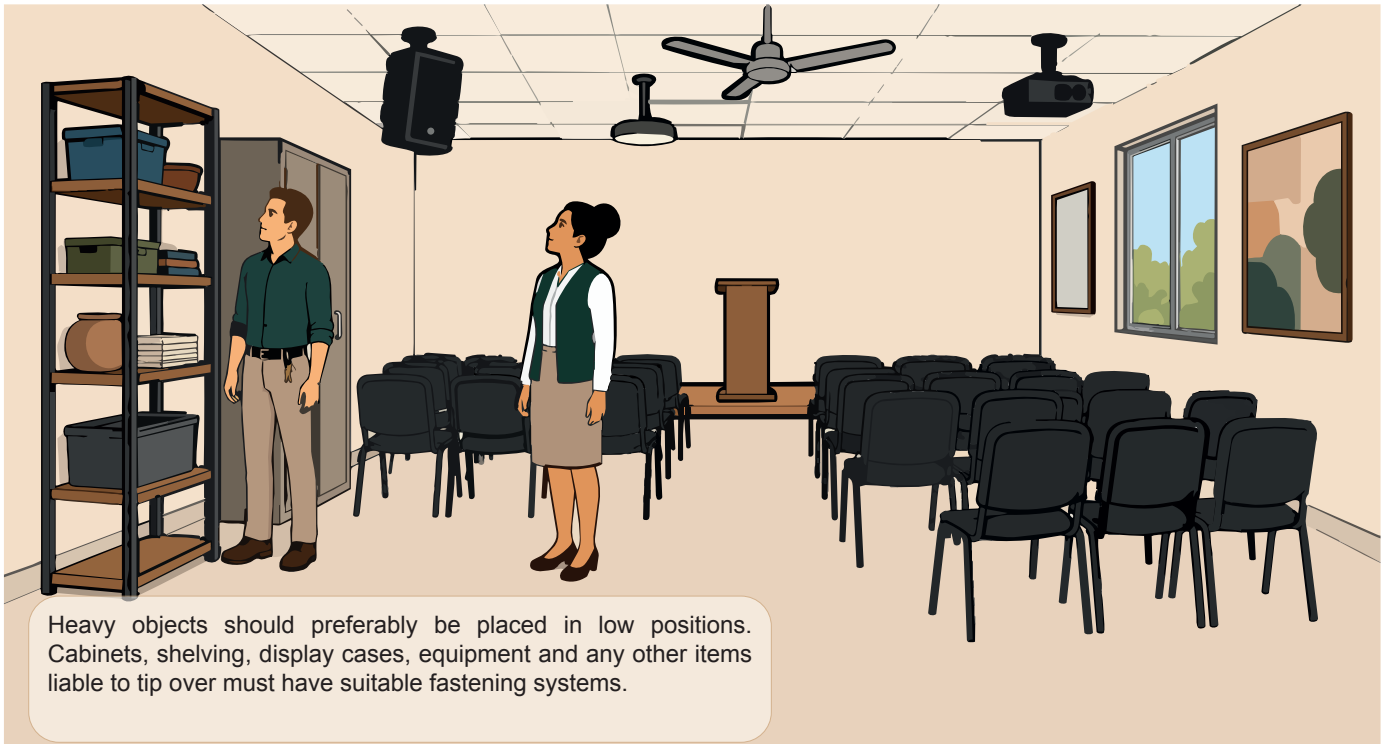
1.1 PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE PREMISES

01

Identifying indoor hazards

The institution's leadership should walk through the premises periodically and identify items that could become hazards during an earthquake. **Pay particular attention to:**

- cabinets
- bookcases
- tall display cases and shelving
- electronic equipment and screens
- televisions and monitors
- sound equipment
- suspended speakers
- projectors
- lamps and chandeliers
- ceiling fans
- paintings
- pictures
- mirrors
- heavy sculptures and decorative objects
- large glazed surfaces
- suspended ceilings and false ceilings
- signs
- items installed above stages
- sports equipment
- elevated tanks
- objects stored up high
- furniture that could shift or tip over
- heavy religious or ceremonial items
- temporary structures used during activities or celebrations

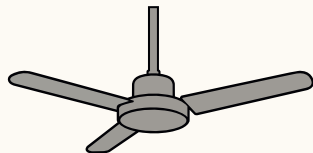


Heavy objects should preferably be placed in low positions. Cabinets, shelving, display cases, equipment and any other items liable to tip over must have suitable fastening systems.

Some of the suspended items that must be correctly installed and secured:



Lamps



Fans



Sound equipment



Projectors

Particular attention must be paid to items located **above places where large numbers of people habitually gather**, such as church pews, auditoriums, meeting halls, dining rooms, stands, classrooms, gyms, stages and children's areas.



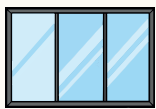


Large glazed surfaces can present a significant risk.

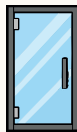
Where appropriate, safety film or other suitable systems may be used to reduce the scattering of fragments if they break.



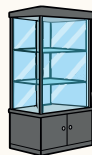
The institution should identify in advance:



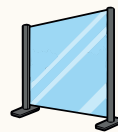
Large windows



glass doors



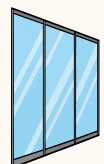
display cases



partitions



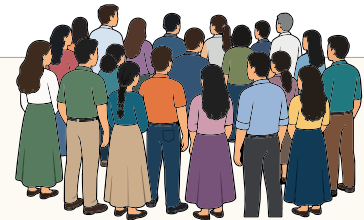
mirrors



glazed panels

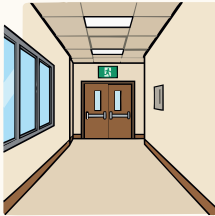


Wherever the layout of the premises allows, **avoid placing seating areas or points where people gather immediately next to large glazed surfaces.**





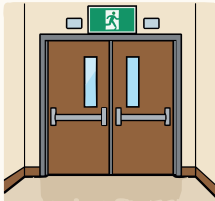
Hallways



Corridors



Stairs



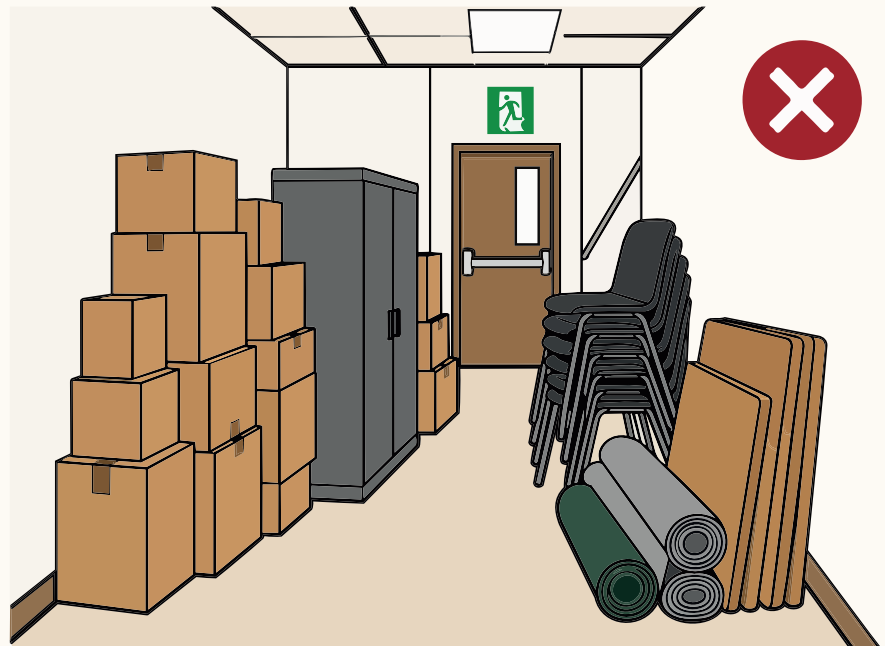
Doors



Exits

Evacuation routes must not be used for storage:

Boxes, furniture, equipment, materials, merchandise, sports items, religious or ceremonial objects, extra chairs, waste, vehicles and anything else that could obstruct movement.



An exit that exists but is blocked, or difficult to use, can be useless during an emergency.

The people in charge must know how the building's doors and exits work.

When an exit requires a key, that key must be kept somewhere **immediately accessible and known to those in charge**, without depending on tracking down one particular person.

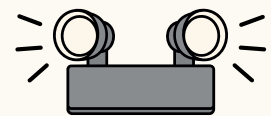
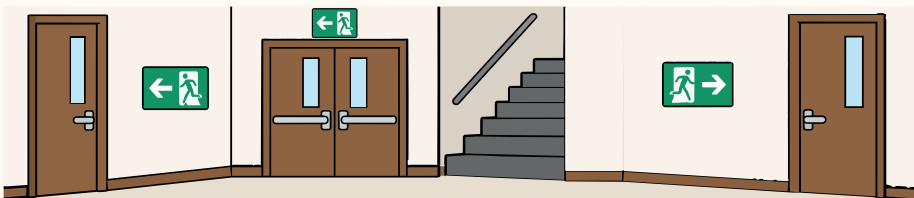
The institution must avoid a situation where a single person is indispensable in order to open an exit.



Local regulations governing doors, emergency exits and opening systems must always be observed.



- Routes and exits must be clearly identified in accordance with the applicable regulations.
- The signage must also be recognizable to people visiting the premises for the first time.
- Where applicable, the institution must have emergency lighting that allows people to find their way in the event of a power outage.





1.2 IDENTIFYING OUTDOOR HAZARDS

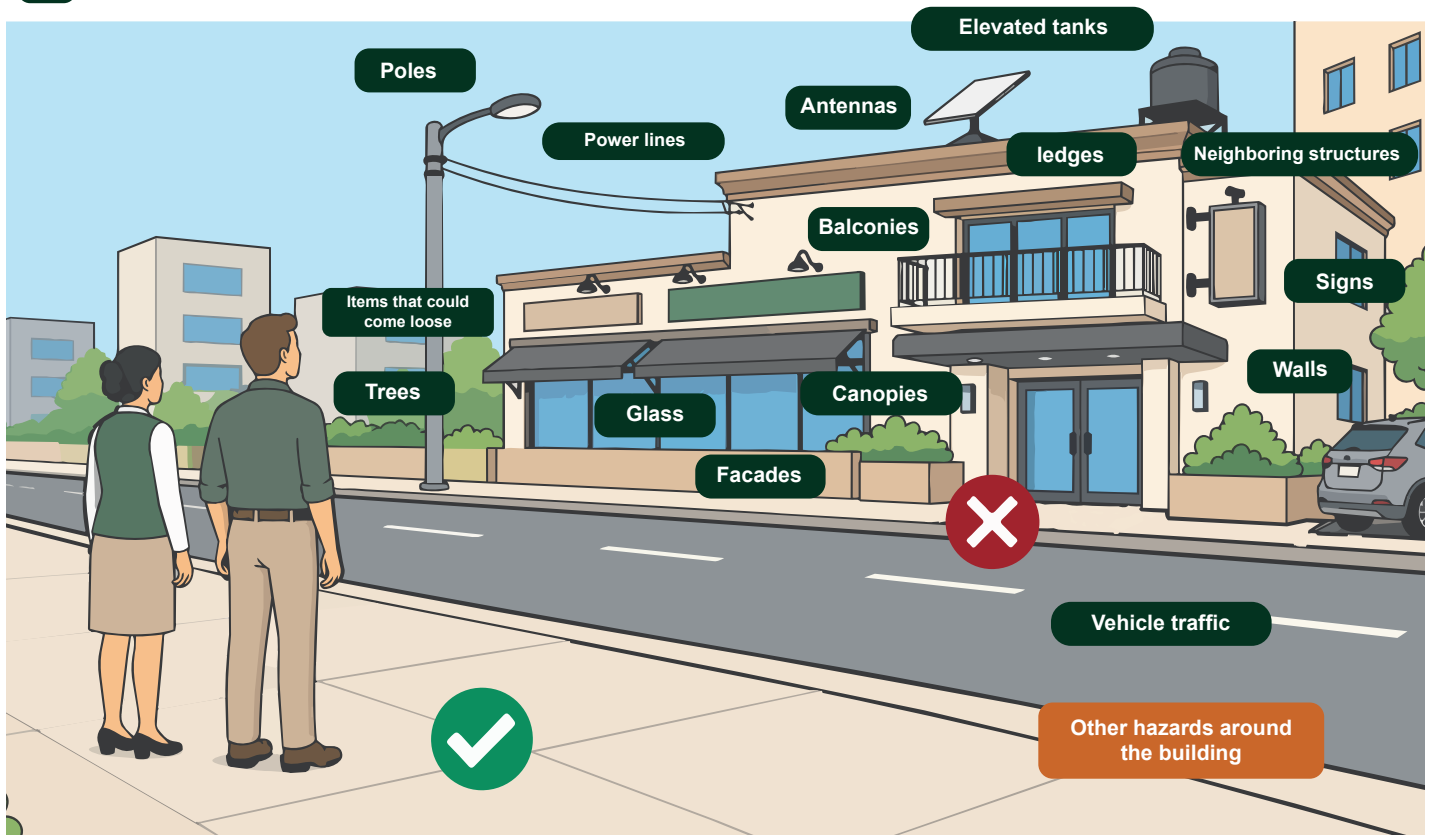


Planning must not stop at the door of the premises.

Before deciding where to gather people after an earthquake, the hazards outside must be assessed.

01

Identify:

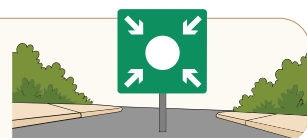


The sidewalk in front of the premises must not automatically be chosen as the meeting point.

After an earthquake, glass, cladding, masonry, signs, ledges and other parts of the facades can fall.



The institution must identify in advance one or more open, clear spaces that can be used as meeting points when evacuation becomes necessary.





1.3 INSTITUTIONAL ACTION PLAN

01

Every institution that regularly gathers people must establish a basic emergency organization in advance.

The plan must be:

Simple

Known

Workable



There is no point in setting up excessively complex procedures that nobody will remember when an emergency happens.

02

Person in overall charge

It must be decided in advance who will take on overall coordination in an emergency.

There must also be **at least one alternate**, because it cannot be assumed that the institution's most senior figure will be present when the earthquake occurs.



For example, depending on the institution, this role could fall to:

- institutional officer
- administrator
- coordinator
- premises manager
- safety officer
- religious leader
- activity leader
- coach or sports coordinator

What matters is not the job title, but that everyone knows in advance who coordinates the response when an emergency occurs.





1.4 ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITIES IN ADVANCE

Every institution that regularly gathers people must establish a basic emergency organization in advance.

01 Overall coordination

Will be responsible for:

- assessing the situation once the shaking has stopped
- ordering the planned actions
- deciding on evacuation where appropriate
- maintaining coordination among those in charge



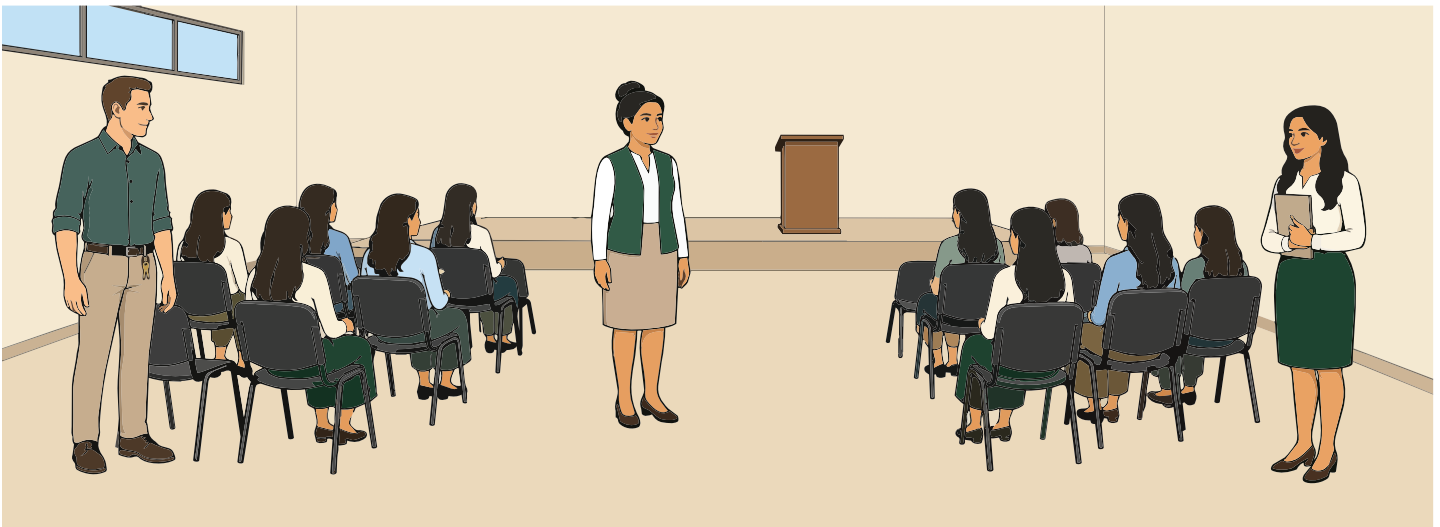
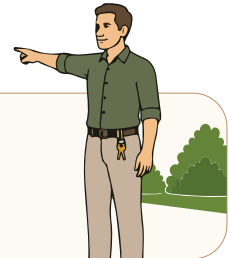
02 Area leads

- In large premises, leads may be designated for different areas, halls, floors or sections.
- Their role will be to guide the people in their area and pass on the established instructions.



03 Evacuation lead

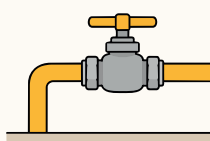
Once the shaking has stopped, and when evacuation becomes necessary, will help direct an orderly exit using the planned routes that remain safe.



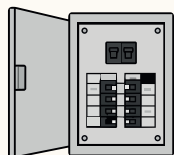
04 Utilities lead

After the earthquake, and only when it is safe to do so, will check the relevant installations.

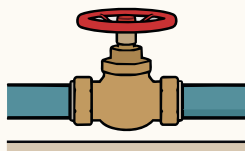
Must know in advance:



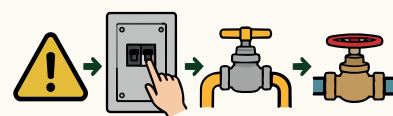
location of the main gas valve



main electrical panel



main water shut-off valve



basic procedures for shutting off the supplies

No one should move through the building during the earthquake to try to shut off the gas, cut the electricity or carry out these checks.

05 First aid leads

The institution should aim to have some people with formal training in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Those in charge must know where the first aid kit and the available emergency equipment are kept.



06 Leads for people who need assistance

It must be planned in advance who will help:

- young children
- people with reduced mobility
- injured people
- older people
- people with disabilities
- anyone who needs support in order to protect themselves or evacuate

07 Communications lead

- internal communications
- passing information to family members where appropriate
- contact with emergency services
- receiving and relaying official instructions





1.5 AVOIDING DEPENDENCE ON A SINGLE PERSON

An institution must not design its response on the assumption that particular people will necessarily be present.

Essential roles must have alternates.

Keys, first aid kits, communication equipment, emergency supplies and access to essential installations must be kept in places known to more than one authorized person.

Knowledge of the institutional plan must be shared.



1.6 PLANNING ACCORDING TO OCCUPANCY

Preparation must take into account **the maximum attendance that can reasonably be expected**, not merely the usual number of employees or staff.

A church may have few people present for much of the week and hundreds during a service.

A club may be practically empty at certain hours and full of children, families and athletes during a competition.

A community center can multiply its occupancy during certain activities.

For that reason, the institution should ask itself:

- How many people can be on the premises at the same time?
- Where do they gather?
- What would happen if the earthquake began during the most heavily attended activity?
- Who would be in charge?
- How would instructions be passed on?
- Are there enough exit routes?
- Which areas present the greatest risks?
- Where would people take cover?
- How would an evacuation be organized afterward?
- Where would people gather?
- How would it be confirmed that no area was left unchecked once it is safe to do so?



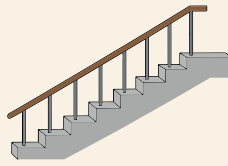


1.7 PEOPLE WHO DO NOT KNOW THE BUILDING

An important characteristic of churches, clubs, associations and community centers is that many of the people present may be visitors. **It must not be assumed that they know:**



the exits



the stairs



the meeting points



the risk areas



the emergency procedures

For that reason, during an emergency, **identified staff, leadership, volunteers and helpers must take an active role in guiding people.**



Instructions must be short, clear and consistent.



1.8 SYSTEMS FOR GIVING INSTRUCTIONS

Where the premises have:

- a public address system
- a sound system
- loudspeakers
- internal radios
- other communication systems

who may use them and what basic instructions should be given must be established in advance.

Power outages during an earthquake should be expected.

For that reason, **the plan must not depend exclusively on electronic systems.**

Those in charge must be ready to give instructions verbally when necessary.

Contradictory orders must be avoided.





1.9 PREPARING FOR CHILDREN

01

Institutions that receive children require specific planning.

02

Do not assume that children will respond to an emergency the same way adults do.

03

Coaches, teachers, coordinators, catechists, children's group leaders, volunteers and any other adults in charge must know in advance how to act.

It must be established:

- who stays with each group
- who assists the children who need it
- how the evacuation will be carried out afterward
- where each group will gather
- how the children's presence will be verified
- how they will later be released to parents, guardians or those responsible, where applicable



Fundamental principle

During the shaking, the priority is to protect children where they are and to stop them from running toward the exits in a disorderly way.

A hurried evacuation while the ground is still moving can expose them to falls, glass, falling objects and crowding.





1.10 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND OTHER ASSISTANCE NEEDS

The institution must anticipate the presence of people who may need additional assistance.

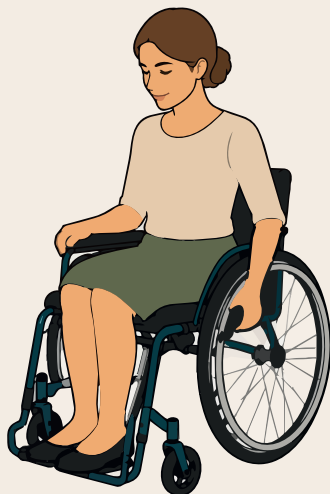
The routes used by people with wheelchairs, walkers, canes or other mobility devices must be kept clear.

Where applicable, the following should be taken into account:

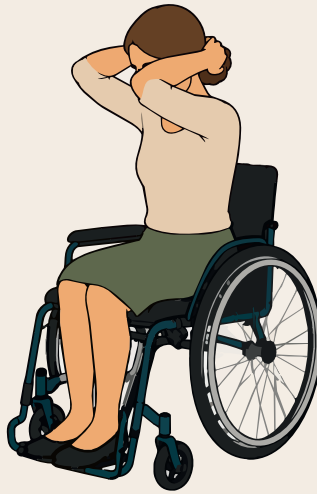
- reduced mobility
- visual disability
- hearing disability
- intellectual or cognitive disability
- neurodivergent people
- older people
- people who require permanent or temporary assistance

Planning must support autonomy and avoid separating a person unnecessarily from their assistive devices.

For people who use wheelchairs, the following can be applied during the shaking:



LOCK



COVER



HOLD ON

**Lock the wheels.
Protect your head and neck.
Lean forward when possible.
Hold on until the shaking stops.**

**Where visual, flashing or vibrating alert systems exist,
they must be kept in working order.**





1.11 INSTITUTIONAL EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

An institution with large numbers of people must not rely solely on the personal belongings of those who happen to be present.

Depending on its size, characteristics and activities, it must keep basic emergency items in places that are accessible and known to those in charge.



These may include:

- First aid kits
- flashlights (preferably some head torches)
- spare batteries
- battery-powered or hand-crank AM/FM portable radio
- whistles
- charged power banks
- charging cables
- masks suitable for dusty environments
- gloves
- basic hygiene items
- emergency water
- thermal blankets
- heavy-duty bags
- protected copies of essential institutional records
- emergency lists and phone numbers
- specific items needed for the institution's activities



These items must be checked periodically.

Medications, food, batteries and any other products with expiration dates must be monitored and replaced when appropriate.





1.12 FIRST AID

The institution must have first aid kits suited to its characteristics and to the usual number of people present.

First aid kits must be:

- clearly identified
- kept in accessible places
- kept fully stocked
- checked periodically
- known to those in charge



Members of the institution should receive formal training in:

- first aid
- cardiopulmonary resuscitation
- basic emergency response

Having a first aid kit does not replace training.





1.13 GAS, ELECTRICITY AND WATER

GAS

The people in charge must know the location of the main supply valve.

Access to it must be kept clear.

Appliances must be correctly installed and secured, and the connections must be appropriate.

No one should move through the premises during the earthquake to try to shut off the gas.

Once the shaking has stopped, and only if it is safe to do so, the installations will be checked. If there are signs of a leak, the supply must be shut off following the corresponding procedure.

ELECTRICITY

The main panel must be identified and its breakers kept correctly labeled.

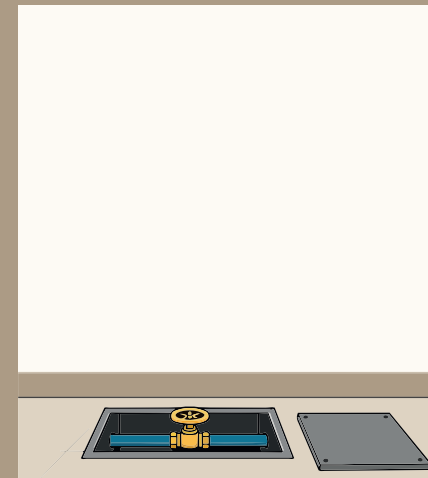
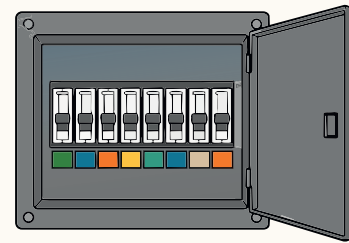
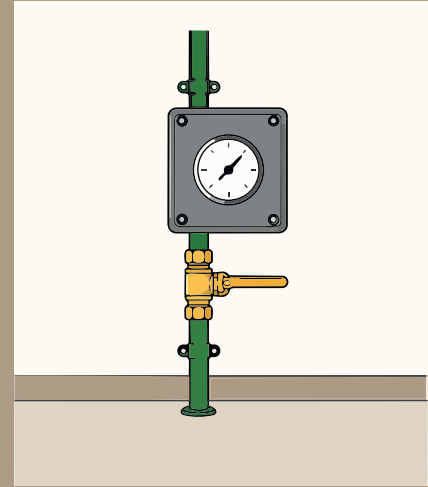
The people in charge must know the procedure for shutting off the supply.

After the earthquake, if there is electrical damage and it can be done safely, the electricity must be shut off.

WATER

The location of the main shut-off valve must be known and access to it kept clear.

After an earthquake, the instructions of the competent authorities regarding the safety of the supply must be followed.





1.14 DRILLS AND TRAINING

The institutional plan must be practiced. Drills reveal problems that can go unnoticed on paper.

Different situations should be practiced; for example:

- earthquake with a large crowd present
- activity with children
- power outage
- usual exit blocked
- presence of a person with reduced mobility
- a particular area being unusable
- need to use an alternative route



Drills should also serve to check whether:

- responsibilities are clear
- routes remain clear
- the people in charge know their roles
- the communication systems work
- the meeting points are suitable
- there are accessibility problems
- the procedure could cause crowding

The aim of a drill is not to complete it quickly, but to learn to act correctly and to find the flaws before a real emergency.



PHASE 2: DURING THE EARTHQUAKE



2.1 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE

When the shaking begins, the immediate priority is to **protect people from falls and from objects that could come loose, shift or break**. In general terms:

DROP



Get down immediately to reduce the risk of being knocked over.

COVER



Protect your head and neck in particular. When possible, get under a sturdy table or desk.

HOLD ON



Stay holding on to whatever is protecting you until the shaking stops.



Door frames are not automatically safe places. In older houses the frames could be the only thing left standing because of how solidly they were built, but in modern construction they are not structurally strong.





2.2 DO NOT ORDER A MASS EVACUATION WHILE IT IS SHAKING

This principle must be known to all of the institution's leadership and staff in charge.



A general rush toward the doors must not be triggered while the shaking continues.

In premises occupied by large numbers of people, trying to evacuate all at once during the earthquake can cause:

- pushing
- falls
- people being trampled
- blocked doorways
- crowding
- exposure to glass
- exposure to falling objects
- loss of control of children
- groups becoming separated
- additional injuries



**The general instruction must be:
PROTECT YOURSELF FIRST.
EVACUATE AFTER THE SHAKING, WHEN IT IS
NECESSARY AND SAFE TO DO SO.**





2.3 CONDUCT OF THOSE IN CHARGE DURING THE SHAKING

Leadership, staff in charge, helpers and personnel should try to keep instructions simple and consistent. When circumstances allow, they should call out:

"DROP – COVER – HOLD ON."

"PROTECT YOUR HEAD AND NECK."

"GET AWAY FROM THE GLASS."

"DO NOT RUN TOWARD THE EXITS."



During the earthquake:

- do not use elevators
- do not run toward the stairs
- do not move around unnecessarily
- stay away from windows and glass
- protect yourself from objects that could fall
- do not try to shut off the gas
- do not try to cut the electricity
- do not unnecessarily leave children or people who depend on your assistance in order to attempt other tasks





2.4 PEOPLE IN SPACES WITHOUT TABLES OR DESKS

In churches, temples, gyms, halls, auditoriums and other large spaces, there may be no sturdy tables available.

In those cases

- drop down so you are not knocked over
- protect your head and neck with your arms
- stay away from windows
- move away, when you can do so without exposing yourself to greater risk, from items that could fall
- stay protected until the shaking stops



Do not run across the hall looking for an exit while the earthquake continues.



2.5 PEOPLE OUTDOORS

Those already outdoors should stay where they are or move, when they can do so safely, toward an open, clear space.

Stay away from:

- buildings
- facades
- cornices
- walls
- glass
- poles
- power lines
- trees
- signs
- antennas
- structures
- objects that could fall



PHASE 3: AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE



3.1 DO NOT RUSH IMMEDIATELY

When the shaking stops, those in charge must quickly assess conditions.

There may be:

- fallen objects
- broken glass
- electrical cables
- structural damage
- fires
- gas leaks
- injured people
- blocked exits
- aftershocks



The possibility of further shaking must be expected.



3.2 ASSESSING THE NEED TO EVACUATE

Evacuation may be necessary in the case of:

- visible damage
- fire
- smell or signs of a gas leak
- electrical risk
- items falling or becoming unstable
- instructions from the authorities
- any other condition that makes it unsafe to remain on the premises



- Evacuation must be carried out using the routes that remain safe.
- **Do not use elevators.**
- If an exit is damaged or hazardous, use the planned alternative when it is safe.





3.3 ORDERLY EVACUATION

When evacuation is decided:

- give clear instructions
- avoid unnecessary shouting
- do not allow running
- avoid pushing
- keep groups of children together
- assist anyone who needs help
- use the planned safe routes
- direct people toward the established meeting point
- keep them away from facades and other hazards



People must not stop immediately in front of the exit doors, because they could block the evacuation of those coming behind them.





3.4 CHILDREN AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

01

Children must remain under supervision.

Where groups have been organized in advance, each leader must keep their group together during the evacuation and at the meeting point.

02

The children's presence must be verified against the available records.

Children must not be allowed to go back into the building alone to look for backpacks, phones, toys, clothing or other belongings.

03

When they are later to be released to their families or guardians, the institution must do so through an organized procedure that avoids any loss of control or confusion.



3.5 MEETING POINT

Once evacuated, people must head for the meeting point established in advance.

The location should, as far as possible, be:

- away from buildings
- away from facades
- away from walls
- away from poles and cables
- away from trees or objects that could fall
- clear of the routes needed by emergency vehicles

An **alternative meeting point** may also be established, for use when the main location proves unsafe or inaccessible.





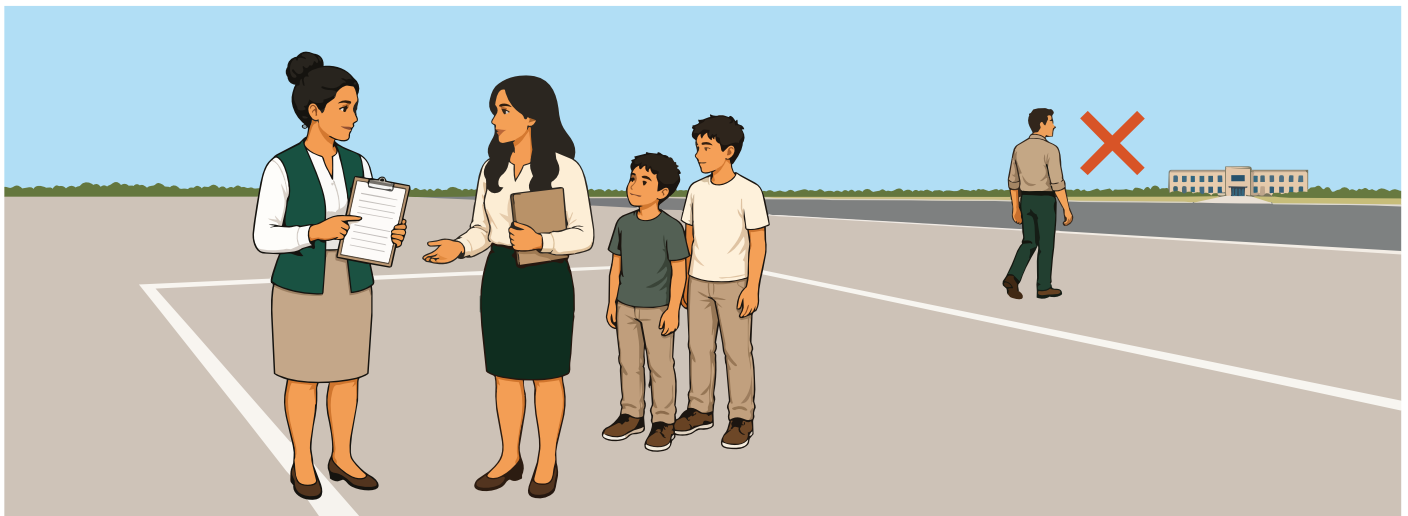
3.6 ACCOUNTING FOR PEOPLE

Where the nature of the activity makes it possible to know who was present (for example, children's groups, sports teams, staff, volunteers, residents or registered participants), a head count must be carried out at the meeting point.

Each person in charge must report immediately if anyone is missing.

However: **no one should go back into a potentially dangerous building on their own initiative to look for a missing person.**

The information about those cases must be reported to the emergency services.



3.7 INJURED PEOPLE

People with first aid training may provide assistance within the limits of their training and provided conditions are safe.



Calling for professional assistance must be the priority whenever it is needed.



Seriously injured people must not be moved unnecessarily, unless remaining where they are represents a greater immediate hazard.





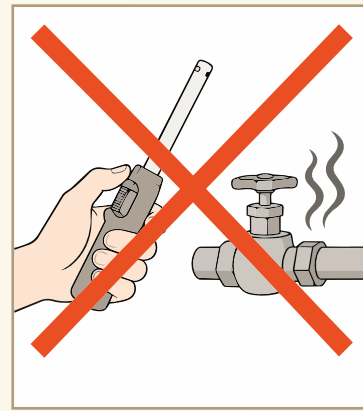
3.8 FIRES, GAS AND ELECTRICITY

After the shaking, stay alert to:

- smell of gas
- smoke
- fire
- sparks
- fallen cables
- damaged electrical equipment
- unusual sounds coming from the installations



- Do not light matches, lighters, candles or other flames if a gas leak is suspected.
- Do not handle damaged utility systems unless conditions are safe to do so.
- The people designated in advance may shut off the supplies where appropriate and where it is safe.



3.9 AFTERSHOCKS



- Aftershocks can occur after an earthquake.
- People must stay ready to protect themselves again.

If shaking begins again:
DROP – COVER – HOLD ON

Do not let the fact that a first earthquake has happened create the false impression that the danger is over.





3.10 DO NOT RE-ENTER AUTOMATICALLY

After evacuating premises, **re-entry must not be ordered simply because the shaking has stopped**. If there is damage, doubt about the safety of the building, or instructions from the authorities, people must stay outside.

Do not allow members, attendees, children, volunteers or staff to go back in merely to retrieve:

- phones
- bags
- documents
- clothing
- vehicles
- personal belongings

People's safety takes priority over property.



3.11 COMMUNICATION AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

Communications must be used responsibly. When networks are congested, short text messages can be more practical than long calls.

The institution should aim to:

- get information from official sources
- avoid spreading rumors
- pass on verified instructions
- state clearly where the evacuated people are, where appropriate
- keep the means of communication available for situations that require them



Social media and messaging services can be useful, but they must not replace official emergency instructions.





3.12 COORDINATION WITH THE EMERGENCY SERVICES

When firefighters, medical services, security forces, civil protection or other competent authorities intervene, the institution must make their work easier.

The institutional lead must be ready to report, when possible:

- what happened
- the approximate number of people present
- whether there are injured people
- whether anyone may be missing
- where they were last seen
- the presence of children or people requiring assistance
- possible gas leaks
- electrical hazards
- fires
- damaged areas
- hazardous substances present on the premises



Once the competent authorities take charge, their instructions must be followed.





3.13 REVIEWING THE PLAN AFTERWARD

After an earthquake, a drill or an emergency, the institution must review how it performed.

Ask:

Did people know what to do?

Did those in charge know their roles?

Were the instructions clear?

Were there attempts to run toward the exits?

Did crowding occur?

Was any exit blocked?

Did the emergency lighting work?

Was it possible to assist children and people with disabilities properly?

Did the communications work?

Was the meeting point suitable?

Were the first aid kits and equipment available?

Were there hazards that had not been identified beforehand?



Any shortcomings found must be corrected.

An emergency plan should be treated as a procedure subject to ongoing review and improvement.



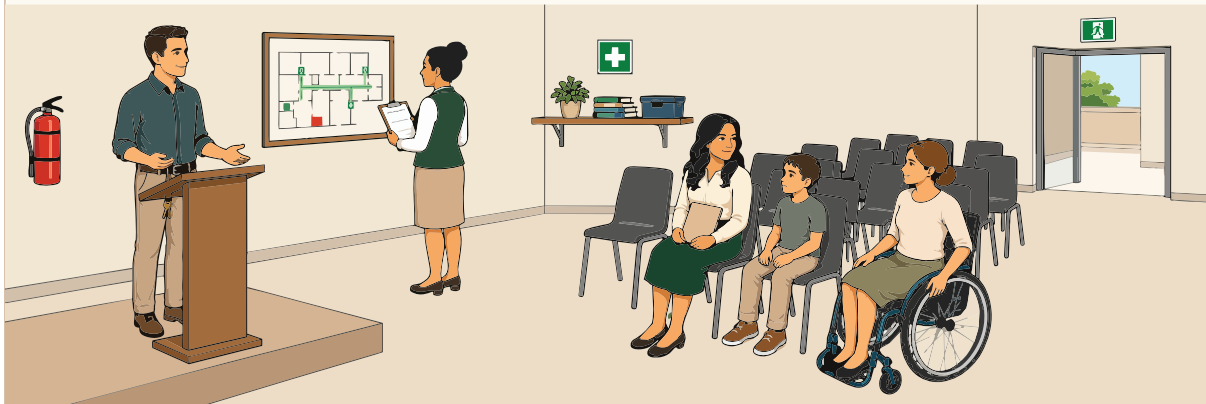
REMEMBER

Institutional preparation begins **BEFORE** the earthquake.

A church, temple, club, association, foundation, community center or any organization that receives people has a particular responsibility: **to prepare not only to protect the building, but to organize and guide whoever may be inside when the shaking begins.**

- Secure objects that could fall.
- Keep routes and exits clear.
- Identify indoor and outdoor hazards.
- Designate leads and alternates.
- Prepare first aid kits and emergency supplies.
- Give particular thought to children, older people, people with disabilities and anyone who needs assistance.
- Establish meeting points.
- Train those in charge, staff and volunteers.
- Hold drills.

And above all, everyone in charge must know and be able to pass on one simple action when the shaking begins:



DROP – COVER – HOLD ON

- Do not trigger a mass evacuation while it is shaking.
 - Protect yourself first.
- Once the shaking has stopped, assess the situation and evacuate in an orderly way when it is necessary and safe to do so.
- A prepared institution can reduce risk, prevent disorder and better protect the people in its care.



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on disaster preparedness.
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Civil Training Program: Risk Management
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EARTHQUAKES IN INSTITUTIONS

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