The ABCs of Post-Earthquake Evacuation

A Checklist for School Administrators and Faculty

"If I had needed to evacuate students, I don't know where I would have taken them. The campus was a mess: trees down, glass, stuff fell off the buildings and was lying all around, water mains were leaking and making geysers in the play field." -Principal, Northridge, 1994

A. Evacuation Basics
B. Before an Earthquake--Inside
B. Before--Outside
C. After an Earthquake--Administrators
C. After--Teachers

A. Evacuation should **NEVER** be automatic.

- There may be more danger outside your building or facility than there is inside.
- There may be no safe assembly area outside. There may be no clear routes to get outside, and altemate routes may need to be cleared.
- The lighting inside your building or room will probably be out--it will be DARK
- Before any decision is made to vacate all or part or a school, someone must find out that there IS 1) a safe route out, and 2) a safe place to assemble the students outside.

B. BEFORE an earthquake (NOW), survey your school with evacuation in mind. 1. Look for potential post-earthquake hazards INSIDE the building:

❏ Suspended ceilings
❏ Pendant light fixtures
❏ Large windows--either exterior or interior--not protected against shattering
❏ Tall bookcases or cabinets that may topple because they are not bolted to the wall
❏ Classroom equipment such as computers, TVs, VCRs, stereos, and slide projectors
❏ Stairwells
❏ Science labs, especially chemistry
❏ Storage areas for cleaning, painting, or other hazardous materials
❏ Shop areas
❏ Places where the main gas supply or electric current enters the building

- Designate evacuation routes that avoid as many of those areas as possible.
- In addition, decide on alternate routes to your main routes.
- Consider students with disabilities as you think about your evacuation routes.

2. Look for potential post-earthquake hazards **OUTSIDE** the building:

❏ Power lines
❏ Trees
❏ Areas near buildings that may have debris fall on them--parapets, roof tiles, chimneys, glass
❏ Routes past concrete block walls
❏ Covered walkways
❏ Places under which large gas mains run
❏ Areas near chain link fences (can be electric shock hazard when live wires touch)
❏ Hazardous materials storage areas

- Designate open areas outside that are without overhead hazards and removed from potential danger spots; choose one, off-campus spot such as a park for back-up.
- Assembly areas should not be so remote from the facility that students and staffwon't have easy access to bathrooms, phones, and the student release point.
- Choose which person(s) will have the responsibility to reconnoiter after a quake and report findings to administration and co-workers.

"After the shaking stopped, I just wanted to get those kids out of there as fast as I could, but luckily I looked out the door first--trees, bricks and wires all over. It's a good thing we didn't leave the building." -Daycare program teacher, Santa Cruz, 1989

3. Everyone should be informed about the plans:

- Once routes and assembly areas have been chosen, make floor plans and maps; give them to everyone
- Tell all personnel and students about the plans made and the routes chosen
- Make it clear that a post-earthquake evacuation route differs from a fire evacuation route, and that altemate routes may need to be used
- Hold drills and exercises two or three times a year; practice altemate routes.
- Include all students and staff with disabilities in the drills and exercises

C. AFTER the earthquake, gather information and make decisions.

ADMINISTRATORS:

1.Assess the situation--inside and outside
2.Decide how much evacuation is necessary--all or parts of buildings
3.Choose the route(s) and the assembly place
4.Communicate directions to all teachers

TEACHERS:

Do NOT automatically rush your class out into the corridor or out an exterior door.

1. Wait to hear from an administrator, or the designated scout, about what to do.

In circumstances in which a lot of time passes and you do not hear anything, you will have to make decisions yourself:

2. If you are in a dangerous classroom--the ceiling has collapsed, wires are crackling, broken glass or chemicals are all over the floor, you smell gas or smoke--you will want to leave, BUT you must do some reconnaissance before you move to safety.

3. Get your buddy to cover the students while you find the best way to get out and the safest place to go . You may not need to go outside, but merely move from one inside room to another.

4. Account for all your students before you leave the classroom.

If your classroom is dangerous, you may want to take injured students with you, or move them a short way to a safer room. If you must leave an injured student, post a large, visible sign indicating the student is there.

The lights will probably be out--ALWAYS have a flashlight that works.

5. Be alert, as you lead students down stairwells or corridors, to anything (dangling lights, ceiling struts, broken glass, slippery floors) that could hurt them or you.

In an aftershock, everyone should duck and cover until the shaking stops.

6. Once you get to your new, safe place, communicate your location to the administrator--by sending a runner, using a walkie-talkie, or returning to your classroom to post a note.

"We waited to see what the teacher did after the earthquake, but he didn't know what to do. He kept saying, 'Don't worry don't worry, stay calm stay calm,' but it was scary" -Student, After-school program, Loma Prieta, 1989