

## **AFTER AN EARTHQUAKE**

Professional advice offered over the radio or television is important. If the safety of a building is uncertain, no one should enter it until a qualified person has inspected it. Aftershocks may cause additional damage to buildings. Those seeking to rescue an animal from an unsafe building should not endanger human lives to do so; they should wait until specialists have determined that it is safe to go in after the animal. In the meantime, food can be thrown in through a window if needed.

Sewers should not be flushed until it has been established that the sewer system is indeed functional. If there is concern that sewers are blocked, the drains should be plugged to prevent back flushing. All tap water should be considered contaminated until it has been clearly established that it is indeed safe. Alternative water sources for drinking include stored emergency supplies, hot water heater if the heater has remained upright, toilet flush tank (not bowl), melted ice cubes, and canned goods. For rinsing and cleaning, swimming pool and hot tub water can be used. Some of these sources of water may still need to be sterilized before use. Boiling is the preferred method for sterilization. Unsuitable sources of water include hot water boilers, home heating systems, radiators, and waterbeds.

Remaining calm is important to reduce personal and animal injuries. Reassuring others is a good way to stay calm. The consequences of any actions should be carefully considered.

Humans should not eat or drink from open containers that were near shattered glass, and such food and drink should not be offered to animals either. Contaminated sources of food or water should be disposed of in a way that keeps them out of any animal's reach. If a "boil water" order is in effect, neither persons nor animals should drink tap water until officials announce that it is safe to do so. Water should be run several minutes once the boil water order is lifted.

Fences used to confine animals should be checked. If fences are knocked down, animals usually escape. Animals that have regular feeding times, such as many zoo animals and livestock, often return to their regular feeding site at mealtime. This is an opportune time to recapture them.

Beaches are not safe places after earthquakes for two reasons. Ground failure can have occurred under the sea, which can generate large waves. This occurred after the Prince William Sound, Alaska, earthquake in 1964. Within Seward, Whittier, and Valdez, 106 people were killed and over \$84 million worth of port facilities was lost. The other danger on distant beaches after an earthquake is tsunamis or tidal waves. These waves travel across the oceans at great speed and crash into coastal areas, often many thousand miles away. The day after the Alaska earthquake in 1964 a large tsunami wave struck the California coast, killing 10 people and causing over \$7 million worth of damage.

### **Injuries**

Earthquakes usually occur without warning. Earthquakes announce themselves by a trembling in the ground or floor and the swaying of hanging lights or planters. Some people feel slightly dizzy. The actual movement of the ground is seldom the direct cause of death or injury to humans and animals. Earthquake-related casualties are commonly caused by the following:

- Partial or total building collapse, including toppling chimneys or walls and falling ceiling plaster, light fixtures, and pictures
- Flying glass from broken windows and skylights (this danger may be greater from

windows in high-rise structures)

- Overturned bookcases and fixtures, and other large furniture and appliances falling on people and animals
- Fires from broken chimneys and broken gas lines
- Electrocutation from fallen power lines
- Exertion and fear leading to heart failure

Special precautions against these common dangers should be taken so that the number of injuries and deaths will be reduced.

Fires caused by earthquakes are particularly dangerous. Broken gas lines often are a major cause of earthquake-related fires. Water mains may be broken. Firefighting equipment may be unable to reach the fire.