

Many Lamorinda Residents Lack Earthquake Preparedness

Prepared for the Big One? If not, you're in good company.

By Jennifer Wake



Brothersons Jefferson, 7, and Jonny Wake, 5, know to stay under a table or desk during an earthquake

Photos Jennifer Wake

Although the recent 5.6 temblor was felt throughout the area and was the topic of conversation for a lot of Lamorinda residents, the likelihood of a small quake pushing people into action to prepare for a larger one is surprisingly low, says Orinda resident and psychiatrist Dr. Harvey Widroe.

Although the U.S. Geological Society says there's a 62 percent chance that at least one 6.7 magnitude quake will hit the Bay Area by 2032, only 17 percent of people in California are prepared for the next big quake. An even lower number of homeowners have earthquake insurance, topping out at only 12 percent.

"Most people don't look at reality objectively because it causes anxiety," Widroe said. "If someone asks if you'll make a plan for what you'd do in an earthquake, they'll say, 'Oh yeah. I'll take care of that tomorrow.'"

Orinda resident Sandy Barnett says she has some water set aside in her home, but that's about it. After the recent quake, a friend of hers gave her information about how to prepare for an earthquake, but all of it seemed overwhelming.

"Where do you put all the stuff?" she said. "Here's my thought: What if I put it all in my garage, and my garage gets crunched? My house has many supplies where I could get them if

I needed to."

During the 1989 Loma Prieta quake, Barnett was standing with her daughter in the near-empty parking lot of the Lafayette Orinda Presbyterian Church. "I had just shut my door and thought, 'Wow. I'm really strong,' because the car was rocking from the force. Then I looked up and saw the light post swaying and the pavement sort of waving like surf and I said to my daughter, 'We're in the perfect spot.'"

A self-professed optimist, Barnett says she's banking on being in the perfect spot again.

"We all gamble every day. I'm on the highway. I'm in the stock market," Barnett said with a smile. "There are too many variables that you don't know. It's hard to cover all the bases."

Widroe agrees.

"It's a kind of circumscribed reality testing deficit based on denial," he said. "If we really looked at the chance of an accident on the highway, we'd all have one anxiety attack after another. Denial averts anxiety and fear. You couldn't live without those mechanisms."

He recommends keeping it simple.

Lafayette resident Marti Kohen, who has now lived through two major earthquakes in California, took advantage of earthquake preparedness talks at Burton Valley Elementary and purchased ready-made kits sold at the presentation.

"I have an earthquake kit in the house plus we have a Jacuzzi and a water purifier, too," she said. "We also have a generator – just in case – and I have a blanket, water and first aid kit in my car."

Kohen said they bought the



Wind-up flashlights, blankets, water, a hammer and first aid kit are a few recommended items.

generator after enduring a category 5 hurricane with no electricity for three days in the Caribbean.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the best defense is to plan ahead, starting by identifying the safe places in every room of your house.

"During a large earthquake, get under a sturdy table or desk and hold on to it," they state on their Web site. "If you're not near a table or desk, cover your face and head with your arms and stand or crouch in a strongly supported doorway, or brace yourself in an inside corner of the house or building, but stay clear of windows or glass that could shatter or objects that could fall on you."

They also advise if you're inside, stay inside. "Many people are injured at entrances of buildings by falling debris."

For most people, a little planning can go a long way.

"We should have a general, one-size-fits-all disaster plan," Widroe said. "Don't task the imagination. Keep a few simple things in mind. Once you start amplifying the list, you get scared, you start using denial, and you toss the list and forget it."

For information on earthquake preparedness plans, you can visit the CDC's Web site:

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/earthquakes/prepared.asp>



Jefferson Wake, 7, practices "Under, Cover, and Wait" in earthquake drill at his home



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