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Local residents urged to practice earthquake preparedness skills during the Great ShakeOut, Oct. 21

By Jennifer Wake

Recent small earthquakes in the Bay Area at the beginning of October underscored the importance of being prepared for a potentially larger, more damaging event. On Oct. 21, at 10:21 a.m., the Great ShakeOut will take place throughout California and Lamorinda CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) is asking everyone to practice their earthquake preparedness skills at this time by ducking, covering and hanging on, and for those who have General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) radios, to use them to tell CERT you are "safe." GMRS is a licensed radio service for short-distance, two-way voice communications.

According to the Great Shakeout website, "You may only have seconds to protect yourself in an earthquake before strong shaking knocks you down, or something falls on you." To respond quickly you must practice often.

"Preparedness skills are essential to learn before an earthquake strikes," says Virginia Merrifield, Lamorinda CERT Public Information Officer. "We encourage you to review with your household members your emergency plans, determine a planned meeting place, and check your emergency supplies of food, water, batteries and other necessities."

For those with GMRS radios, at 10:21 a.m. Lamorinda CERT will announce a mock earthquake and ask for a response to "net control" via the GMRS channels to confirm your location (street and cross street). "The goals of this exercise are to test this communications method and to see where we can reach during a real emergency," Merrifield says. "The radio channels we will use are Moraga 121, Orinda 122, and Lafayette 123 for licensed users on repeater capable radios. We recommend when transmitting that you preface your message by saying 'this is only a drill,' then report into net control with status of your area including your location."

This exercise will help residents practice the skills they have and maybe some that need to be improved so when the Big One really strikes, they'll be ready. Check out the California Great ShakeOut website for more information (www.shakeout.org/california). Consider taking the next CERT class series beginning in January on Wednesday nights in Orinda. For class information as well as emergency supplies you may need, you can find both on the website at www.LamorindaCERT.com.

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