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Resources

► [Safety](#)

► [Pressroom](#) (web)

► [Ask the CEO](#)

► [CEO Forum](#)

► [Employee Recognition](#)

► [Employee Activities](#)

► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#) (web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

► [Research Center/Library](#)

► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Bazaar](#)

Metro Info

► [30/10 Initiative](#)

► [Policies](#)

► [Training](#)

► [Help Desk](#)

► [Intranet Policy](#)

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Emergency Preparedness Manager Hopes to Shake Complacency

Scott Norwood, emergency & homeland security preparedness manager, stands approximately 40 feet from the Gateway Tower. Norwood recommends, however, that someone evacuating the building after an earthquake take shelter 450 feet from it.

Photo by Ned Racine



- New emergency preparedness manager argues for survivability
- [What to do:](#) The American Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offer advice on earthquake preparedness:

By NED RACINE, Editor

(Aug. 28, 2008) In the light of the July 29 earthquake that swayed the Gateway Tower, Scott Norwood, emergency & homeland security preparedness manager, would like you to prepare for the next earthquake, even though he understands preparedness flies in the face of human nature.

"What tends to happen as soon as the last earthquake is over [is people], tend to forget about everything, like with most things that are stressful and relatively unpleasant," said Norwood, who has held his Metro position for five months. "I think it's human nature to say, 'OK, well, we got through that.' "

He knows preparedness remains a tough sell. But Norwood, who has lived through multiple Southern California earthquakes, compares earthquake preparedness to insurance.

"If you don't need to prepare, why do you buy insurance?" the Monrovia resident asked. "Because that is what insurance is. [Fortunately] you can rebuild whatever you lost, but you can't replace your life."

To help you survive the next quake, whether you are at work or home, he preaches avoiding panic and showing patience.

"[With panic] people forget everything they're trained [to do], everything that they need to think about," he explained. "It's that fight-or-flight thing. They're going to try to get out."

Getting out, he stressed, just might get you killed. Norwood noticed on July 29 that some employees who had left the building were congregating a few feet outside the Gateway Tower's main entrance. "You're standing right at ground zero if you're doing that."

Because one of the common ways people are injured during an earthquake is by falling glass and debris and because falling glass may sail as it falls, experts calculate someone evacuating a building should travel 1.5 times the height of the building away from the structure.

That would put a person approximately 500 feet from the Gateway Tower, near the bus turnaround at south end. Even then, Norwood cautions against the East Portal's glass and nearby power lines.

Consequently, Norwood preaches the value of patience, of staying in a location if you feel safe and waiting for evacuation orders, rather than running down the nearest stairwell (always avoid elevators in an earthquake).

"You may end up getting hurt in a situation where there was no need for anyone to be hurt," he said, noting that some people are trampled during a panicked evacuation. "It may be that the shaking was the worse thing we had to endure."

Norwood noted that a building swaying, as the Gateway Tower did on July 29, is not always a bad sign, as frightening as it feels. "The more rigid a structure is, the more at risk it is," he said. "If you're moving, that's actually a good thing."

In the case of extensive shaking or increasing shaking, Norwood recommends an employee move to the core of the building and away from windows. And taking cover under a desk, he said, offers important protection. Despite superficial damage, the building you work in may still be safe.

For more protection, Norwood recommends having a pair of closed-toe shoes nearby—in case employees have to walk through a field of broken glass. For hydration, he keeps a 12-pack of diet soda in his office for hydration and a case of water in his car.

Water, he stressed, is the key supply. "You can go three days without food, almost everyone can, without being in a life-threatening condition. People normally can't go three days without water."

Building Services has enough water packs and dry rations for 2,000 people for three days in the Gateway Tower. Other Metro facilities have equivalent stockpiles.

And because Metro Security is tied into the Los Angeles County Emergency Operations Center, security officers at the divisions and at Gateway will know the extent of the earthquake damage and will share information with each other.

“People tend to underestimate the power of mother nature as opposed to the ability of humans to handle it,” he said.

The [American Red Cross](#) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency ([FEMA](#)) offer advice on earthquake preparedness:

Five things to remember when an earthquake strikes Metro

- Don't panic; do not run outside!
- If time allows, get under your desk or in another protected area, duck and cover.
- Wait for instruction from your floor warden or supervisor.
- Remember that earthquakes often come in groups.
- If you are instructed to evacuate, remain calm and proceed in an orderly fashion.

When an earthquake hits when you are home

Before

- Stock at least a three-day supply of food, water (one gallon per person per day) clothes (at least one complete change of clothing and footwear per person), first aid and medical supplies, eyeglasses, extra cash (including coins), sanitation supplies, bedding, tools, a portable radio with batteries and other items your family will require.
- Conduct earthquake drills (including ducking under furniture) every six months with your family.
- Identify the safest places in each room in your home so you know where to take cover during an earthquake. This would be away from shelves, glass windows and heavy objects that might fall.
- Identify each way to exit your home and keep each route clear.
- Decide where and when to unite should you be apart when an earthquake hits.
- Choose a person out of the area for family members to contact if they become separated.
- Locate shutoff valves for water, gas, and electricity. Train each family member how to turn off utilities before an earthquake.
- Make copies of vital records and make photos and/or video of your valuables. Keep these records in a safe deposit box or with a trusted relative/friend in another city or state.
- Know the policies of the school or daycare center your children attend.

During

- Remain calm.
- If you are inside; stay inside.
- Protect yourself by ducking under a heavy piece of furniture or in a hall near an interior wall while covering your head and neck.
- Do not stand in a doorway. The door may injure you during the shaking.

- Stay away from appliances, large glass panes, shelves holding objects, and large decorative masonry, brick or plaster such as fireplaces.
- Keep hallways clear. They are usually one of the safest places to be during an earthquake. Stay away from kitchens and garages, which tend to be the most dangerous places.
- If you smell gas, do not turn on an electric light.

After

- Check for injuries and give aid.
- Only use the phone for serious injury or fires.
- Check gas and water leaks, broken electrical wiring and sewage lines. If you have turned your gas off, do not attempt to turn it back on! To safely re-establish service, you must call the Gas Company.
- Check the building for cracks and damage.
- Check food and water supplies.
- Turn on radio or television for instructions.
- Keep the streets clear for emergency vehicles.
- Be prepared for aftershocks.
- Remain calm and help others. If evacuating, post a message inside your home telling family members where to find you.

