



Residential and Commercial
Property Inspections

An Earthquake is Coming

The next big earthquake is not a matter of if; it's a matter of when. No one can predict exactly when, but the devastation 10 years ago in Los Angeles was a demonstration of what to expect when it does. Immediately following the Northridge quake I personally did an average of 10 Postearthquake seismic safety inspections a day and only stopped for one day six months later when my vehicle finally quit. I spent my first and only day off buying a new vehicle and got right back to inspecting buildings the next day. A large majority of the damage I found was minor but some was amazingly serious. However, the most amazing thing that stood out overall was how incredibly unprepared for a disaster most people were, both physically and emotionally.

Most people I helped lacked even the basics. I don't mean just not having water storage or a flash light, it was also not knowing where the main gas valve, water valve and electric meter were located and what to do when they found it. I saw the confusion and anxiety that caused.

In this short article I cannot detail out all the different locations and handlings for the many styles and types of valves and switches there could be but I will go into some basics.

Take the time to locate where the main gas, water and electric services come into your residence. See if you need a key or a tool to get into and operate the gas and water shut off valves and main electrical switch. If so, find what you need or head to the local hardware store and get the tools and instructions on how to use them and place it in a handy spot.

Check the water heater for proper bracing so it will remain standing after a major shake. If the gas and water get shut down, the water in this tank can be used to drink by draining it into containers using the valve at the bottom.

Assemble an earthquake kit with medical supplies. Create a disaster plan. Check your home for potential hazards and visit the "Earthquakes" page at LaRoccaInspect.com for a list of key web sites on earthquake preparedness programs and disaster assistance.

Make the other family members aware of these facts as well so if you are hurt, someone else will know what to do. Also, just knowing where to go and what to do stabilizes a person's thoughts and gives them a direction instead being overwhelmed by panic and confusion.

I fear most people have short memories or have the "it'll never happen to me" attitude. Don't let that be you. Finding tools or a hardware store open and able to help in an emergency is not something to rely on.

After the 1994 Northridge Earthquake many millions of dollars were spent upgrading buildings, roads and communications to prepare for the next one. I hope you will follow suit. Get prepared now; be at cause over your environment so you will be less the effect of it.

By John A. LaRocca, Inspector Member of the California Real Estate Inspection Association (CREIA) and a licensed general contractor. For other questions or comments he can be contacted at (818) 951-1795 or www.LaRoccaInspect.com.