



GARY R. HERBERT
Governor

SPENCER J. COX
Lieutenant Governor

State of Utah

UTAH SEISMIC SAFETY COMMISSION

ROGER EVANS
Chair

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The Utah Seismic Safety Commission (USSC) is aware of e-mails questioning the earthquake safety procedure “Duck, Cover, and Hold on.” These emails recommend an alternative approach of looking for triangular void spaces during an earthquake (termed the “Triangle of Life”). However, the USSC advises that the Duck, Cover, and Hold On procedure is the most appropriate and tested method for avoiding injury and death from falling objects in homes, schools, and businesses.

The Duck, Cover, and Hold On procedure is based on the premise that the built environment in the United States is superior to that in many developing countries (for which the Triangle of Life method was developed). Because of seismic provisions in building codes, stringent building inspections, and superior building materials, the structural collapse of buildings in the United States occurs infrequently. Further, earthquakes have been shown to cause significant non-structural and content damage, for example, caused by falling ceiling and light fixtures and toppled bookcases and cabinets. Falling objects pose a real risk of injury or death. Taking cover under sturdy furniture, such as a desk or table, will greatly reduce the possibility of injury or death.

Thus, until advised otherwise by a national safety organization, the USSC—based on provisional guidance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and its own technical judgment—recommends continuation of Duck, Cover, and Hold On as an appropriate earthquake safety measure in Utah.

The Utah Division of Emergency Services, California Office of Emergency Services, Structural Engineers Association of California, and American Red Cross concur with this position.

In the event that you may need additional information, please contact any of the USSC members or staff (www.ussc.utah.gov/contact.html).

Roger Evans,
Chair

