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UTAH SEISMIC SAFETY COMMISSION

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November 1, 2004

The Utah Seismic Safety Commission at its last quarterly meeting was made aware of an e-mail that many of your schools may have been receiving over the past few months. It involves the safety procedure of “Duck, Cover and Hold” used during an earthquake to protect students, faculty and staff from falling objects. For reasons described below, we advise that “Duck, Cover, and Hold” is still an appropriate procedure to be practiced and used.

The e-mail that schools have been receiving disparages this practice in favor of the “Triangle of Life” as espoused by Mr. Doug Copp. This situation occurs when building floors and roofs collapse and form triangular voids near load-bearing walls. This method may be appropriate when you are in regions where building collapse is frequent or you may not be able to take cover. His premise, based on his experiences with search and rescue in Turkey, is that individuals will be crushed when buildings collapse. He feels that individuals should disregard the “Duck, Cover, and Hold” safety procedure or, as he puts it, “everyone will be crushed and will die”.

The Commission’s position is that the built environment in the United States differs significantly from the assumed scenario. Our building codes, building inspections, and building materials are far superior. Structural collapse in the US is a rare event. Moreover, earthquakes have been shown to cause significant non-structural and content damage such as falling ceiling and light fixtures and bookcase and cabinet toppling. This is where the real risk to injury or death lies. Taking cover under school desks and tables will greatly reduce the possibility of death or injury.

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