

Emergency Preparedness Pointers

Public Environments

When the Unexpected Happens in Public Places

Many of us, some since childhood, have been taught how to “Stop, Drop and Roll” for fires and to “Drop, Cover and Hold” for earthquakes. The issues of terrorism present us with many new challenges. One challenge is that large, crowded public places such as sports arenas, airports and shopping malls, may be singled out as targets. This is partially because some of those locations have come to symbolize American culture and that large numbers of people could be hurt, or killed, at once. We also have to realize that terrorists rely on shock and surprise. They want to create the most publicity possible for their causes. They want people to panic and feel helpless. This is why we should really stop and think about how to react to emergency situations that may occur suddenly in crowded, public locations.

Terrorists want to disrupt our daily lives. Don’t let them. Continue to live your life, but be alert and aware of your surroundings. Knowledge is power. The more you understand about the behavior of crowds in emergencies, the

STOP:

When you realize something dangerous is happening, resist the urge to panic and run. Wait a moment to get your bearings and to understand what is going on.

LOOK:

Look around you. Where is the source of the problem? What is your most immediate source of danger? Where are your safest exits? Are there others who also need help?

THINK:

Remember what you have learned about behavior in emergencies:

- ✓ If there is falling debris, drop down; take cover under something sturdy, and hold on to something with one hand while protecting your head and neck with the other.
- ✓ If there is smoke, stay near the floor.
- ✓ If you need to evacuate, look for marked exits and do not use elevators.

ACT:

All this may take only seconds, but it could save your life. By pausing first to **stop, look and think**, you can act with a clear goal in mind. Your decisive action and calmness may also help others to overcome anxiety and also act appropriately.

Pay attention. Make a quick plan to protect yourself and move away from the danger.

Wherever You Are, STOP, LOOK, THINK and ACT

If you are at a shopping mall: Look out for broken glass from store-fronts. If you are inside a store, take cover and then assess what has happened. If you smell something odd, cover your mouth and nose with a cloth. Most malls have trained security forces that have plans in place for most emergencies. Many have emergency lighting that will come on within minutes. If you need to evacuate, use only marked exits, if possible, and avoid elevators. Carry small children so that they can not be overtaken by the movement of a crowd.

If you are at a sports arena, theater, or religious facility: If there’s an earthquake, explosion, or even a shooting, get down between the rows of seats (drop, cover and hold) until things settle down. If you smell something strange, cover your nose and mouth with a cloth. If you smell smoke or see fire, listen for warnings or instructions over the public address system before choosing a direction to evacuate. Carry small children so that they can not be overtaken by the movement of a crowd. Be careful of bottlenecks at exit points.

If you are at an airport: Very well-trained security officials have detailed plans for all kinds of emergencies and will give travelers and airport employees specific instructions. Follow their directions and use all the power of your mind to avoid panic. Never leave your luggage or personal items unattended. **As always, if you see something that seems suspicious, tell a security officer.**