



*Earthquake Awareness Week 2012
Let's Take Action
Director General's Message
Ronald Jackson*

Jamaicans are well aware of the risk of being struck by an Earthquake. History has shown that our country has had its fair share of tragic encounters, none more famous than the 1692 earthquake which changed the face of Port Royal and 1907 Great Kingston earthquake which destroyed several buildings and thousands of lives were lost. More recently, the Earthquake Unit has reported that in 2011 approximately 13 felt earthquakes were recorded, which is an increase in seismic activity over the last ten years.

As the country commemorates Earthquake Awareness Week 2012 the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) would like to implore Jamaicans to be more proactive in making preparations in the eventuality of an earthquake.

Earthquakes hit with little or no warning. Consequently we often find ourselves in very vulnerable situations where we are concerned not only for our own safety, but the safety of our loved ones who are more than likely in different locations. Despite the suddenness of an earthquake, there are actions we can take to protect ourselves and our loved ones. The most important action is to edify ourselves about the various mitigation measures to be implemented in case of a quake.

Your first action in mitigating against the effects of an earthquake should be to ensure we build according to approved standards and in the right place. In the event an earthquake strikes; the **Drop, Cover, Hold** procedure or what we at the ODPEM would like to call the **DCH**. During an earthquake: **Drop** under a sturdy piece of furniture, making yourself into a little ball. **Cover**; keep your head and eyes protected from falling or flying objects and cover your head with one hand. **Hold** with your other hand; hold onto the piece of furniture. If it moves, move with it. Stay under shelter until you are sure the shaking has stopped. If you are not near any sturdy furniture, take cover in a sturdy doorway.

One must also note that an earthquake can trigger secondary hazards, notably a tsunami. The Great East Japan Earthquake of magnitude 9.0 struck the country on March 11, 2011. It was the most powerful known earthquake ever to have hit Japan, and one of the five most powerful earthquakes in the world. This earthquake had triggered powerful tsunami waves, which reached heights of up to 40.5 metres (133 ft) causing additional loss of life and destruction of infrastructure. We must not forget that our own country was placed under a Tsunami Watch on January 12, 2010 after the Haitian Quake.

With this in mind we must know the signs of a Tsunami and take action. If you are at the beach or near the coastline and feel the ground shaking, see the sea withdraw far back from the shore or hear a strange roar, run! Run as fast as you can inland and to higher ground.

The ODPEM, with its partner agencies, continues to educate, develop and test various risk reduction mechanisms to build Jamaica's resilience to both earthquakes and tsunamis. However, we can only do this successfully with the support of our people, with each person playing his/her part within their homes, schools, businesses and communities. So join us Jamaica, not only this week but to embed this in our every day lives by taking action. Actions to educate, build and create a stronger disaster resilient culture which will lead to a more disaster resilient nation.

***"Earthquakes can strike anywhere, anytime.
Be prepared there are no signs."***