The Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind provides some of its key learnings on earthquake preparedness and response for the blind or partially sighted. If your neighbour, a family member of someone you know in your community is blind or partially sighted you can also help them to prepare.

EARTHQUAKE PREPAREDNESS

If you are blind or partially sighted here are some useful things you can do to prepare:

* Prepare your home environment for readiness for a disaster. This should include identifying what risks to health, human life and property there are in your home. If you’re storing something that might cause serious harm or damage if it fell, find somewhere safer to keep it. An example might be a bookcase you have leaning against a wall that, during an earthquake, might fall on you - have it fixed into position. Take steps to eliminate these sorts of risks where practical or to at least reduce the likelihood and magnitude of their impact. If you’d like help with making your home safer ask a friend, relative or neighbour to help you. You can also contact the RNZFB for advice.
* Have an emergency survival kit - see the Home Emergency Survival Kit list at the end of this document for the basic items to include, and consider what other items might be useful to keep in it. For example, in your kit you may also want to keep a spare pocket magnifier or set of UV Shield Glasses, spare white cane, or extra dog food and water if you have a guide dog. In some situations protective equipment such as goggles, dust masks and leather gloves might also be helpful.
* Develop a self-help and response programme that caters to your sight loss needs. Work with friends, family and neighbours to create a potential evacuation and escape plan for your home and work environment which also has several alternative escape routes and plans for obtaining immediate/urgent assistance when escaping may not be possible.
* Find a neighbour who is willing to partner with you as your ‘emergency buddy’. Agree on what you both might need urgently in an emergency, who will do what and how etc. Let them know your personal preferences in sighted guiding techniques, in case they might need to help you get to safety during or after an earthquake. Agree to do regular safety checks on each other if possible in the days immediately following the earthquake too.
* Learn what to do to keep safe during an earthquake. Check the [www.getready.govt](http://www.getready.govt).nz website to learn how to keep safe during an earthquake, and what do before, during and after an earthquake. Identify the safe spots in your house that will offer you the most protection during an earthquake and practice how to safely drop, cover and hold. If you’d like some help ask your ‘emergency buddy’ to help you practice.
* Know where and how to get information following a disaster and which radio channels to listen to in your area to stay updated with important information. Keep telephone numbers for organisations such as Civil Defence, Red Cross and RNZFB in more than one place – you may not necessarily be able to get to the place in your house where your telephone or address books are stored, or you may not be able to find your mobile phone.
* Consider keeping a spare mobile phone charger in your emergency supply kit and (because electricity may not be available during and emergency situation) an adaptor for charging in a car. Your neighbours may have cars available for charging your mobile in.
* Keep your mobile phone fully charged at the start of each day, especially in an emergency situation, and keep the phone on you at all times.

If your neighbour, a family member or someone you know in your community is blind or partially sighted here are some things you can do to help them prepare:

* Make yourself known. If you haven’t already met, introduce yourself and let them know who you are. Find out who their most regular or close-by friend and/or support person is. If they don’t have any friends or family living close by perhaps you might be happy to offer to be their ‘emergency response buddy’.
* Help them prepare their home environment for readiness for an emergency. Help them identify any items that could be potential hazards in an earthquake and what might be done to eliminate or minimise any risks. You could also help them decide what needs to be in their emergency kit, or the best place in their home for them to go to protect themselves during an earthquake.
* Find out how to be a sighted guide for them. They might need your assistance getting to safety during or immediately after an earthquake. Knowing how to guide a person effectively will make it easier and faster to do in an emergency.

WHEN AN EARTHQUAKE HAPPENS

If you are blind or partially sighted some useful things you can do are:

* Get to a safe spot and drop, cover and hold until the shaking stops.
* If you are trapped in your home, are injured, or have serious health concerns contact Emergency Services by calling 111 immediately.
* Let a neighbour, friend or family member know your status as soon as possible after the quake. To reduce burden on telecommunications systems, text rather than telephone with your name and status, for example if you’re fine and unharmed you might text “Jo Bloggs, ok, at home”. If the environment you are immediately in is safe, try to avoid moving away from it until you know how things have changed outside of it. If you can, wait for help to arrive and let them tell you how your environment has changed - where is safe, where is dangerous and where should be avoided.
* Contact the Red Cross for assistance if all of your food and water supplies have been damaged or lost, or you are aware of someone who’s gone missing resulting from the earthquake. Let them know about your sight loss so that they understand what other assistance you might need.
* If you have a guide dog who’s been distressed by the event and you can access your emergency kit, put a few drops of Rescue Remedy if you have some into their water bowl and encourage them to take a drink. Contact the RNZFB Guide Dog Service on 09 269 0400 or via 0800 24 33 33 as soon as possible for advice.
* If you’ve had to flee or evacuate your home, let someone (a neighbour, friend or relative) know that you’re not there anymore so that Search and Rescue know you are safe rather than missing.
* As soon as is practical and possible, let the RNZFB know your status and whether you’re still in your home or have had to evacuate/relocate.

If you know someone in your community is blind or partially sighted some useful things you can do are:

* Check on them to see if they’re ok – where are they, are they in their house or garden? Do they know what’s just happened? Do they know how to get out of any dangerous or tight spot they might be in post-quake, or do they need a hand?
* Find out if they have a working mobile phone or landline. Whilst it’s likely that mobile and landline communications will be out of action for some time, they might appreciate you offering to call one of their friends or family. It also prevents their friends and family from feeling unnecessarily distressed not knowing what’s happened to them.
* Check their home for dangerous changes and describe those to them. An example might be “Jo there is now a large crack in the footpath outside and the ground is not level”. The information you give them will greatly assist them to more safely navigate their changed environment and understand how to keep themselves safe from any hazards.
* Ask if they need help with orientating themselves and getting around, because their physical environment may have changed significantly and their ability to rely on visual cues for finding safe egress may be compromised.
* Check that they have items for basic survival such as water, food and the location of temporary toilet facilities.
* Check whether any equipment that they rely on related to their sight loss has been damaged. These are things like magnifiers, their white cane, or a talking clock or watch. The RNZFB will endeavour to urgently replace priority items for free.
* Check on their Guide Dog if they have one. Guide dogs can become severely distressed and require assistance to calm and settle. Contacting the RNZFB Guide Dog Service for assistance from a trained professional will be important and appreciated. A few drops of rescue remedy regularly put into their water bowl can help in the interim whilst awaiting specialist assistance from a Guide Dog Instructor. Make sure a patch of grass is available to allow the dog to toilet outside (as guide dogs are trained to only relieve themselves in specific areas).

YOUR HOME EMERGENCY SURVIVAL KIT

Some basic items to include in your home emergency kit are:

* 3 x 2.5 litre bottles of water
* Dried food (enough to last two days) such as cereal bars, bagged nuts, crackers, dried fruits
* 4 x cans of dog food (if you have a guide dog)
* Rescue Remedy (if you have a guide dog)
* 1 x transistor radio
* Batteries (to fit your radio)
* 1 x packet of wet wipes for personal hygiene, hand washing etc.
* 1 x box of facial tissues
* 1 x pack of toilet tissue
* 1 x packet of plastic bin liners (for hygienically storing refuse and waste)
* Medicines, particularly if there are any that are critical to your daily survival
* Personal hygiene products
* 1 x common car operated mobile phone charger and/or adaptor
* 1 x torch (dependent on your visual acuity)

Think carefully about what other items you would need to survive on your own for 3 days and add them to this list.

Other helpful resources to have on hand:

* Maps of areas surrounding your home
* Telephone numbers for Civil Defence, your local council, local government agencies (such as WINZ), the Red Cross, the RNZFB.
* Local radio station channel numbers