

# The “Triangle of Life” & Why It Isn’t Safe

**DO NOT get in the "triangle of life":** In recent years, an e-mail has been circulating which describes an alternative to the long-established "Drop, Cover, and Hold On" advice. The so-called "triangle of life" and some of the other actions recommended in the e-mail are potentially life threatening, and the credibility of the source of these recommendations has been broadly questioned.

The "triangle of life" advice (always get next to a table rather than underneath it) is based on several wrong assumptions:

- Buildings always collapse in earthquakes (wrong- especially in developed nations, and flat "pancake" collapse is rare anywhere);
- When buildings collapse they always crush all furniture inside (wrong- people DO survive under furniture or other shelters);
- People can always anticipate how their building might collapse and anticipate the location of survivable void spaces (wrong- the direction of shaking and unique structural aspects of the building make this nearly impossible) ; and
- During strong shaking people can move to a desired location (wrong- strong shaking can make moving very difficult and dangerous).

Some other recommendations in the "triangle of life" e-mail are also based on wrong assumptions and very hazardous. For example, the recommendation to get out of your car during an earthquake and lie down next to it assumes that there is always an elevated freeway above you that will fall and crush your car. Of course there are very few elevated freeways, and lying next to your car is very dangerous because the car can move and crush you, and other drivers may not see you on the ground!

In MOST situations, you will reduce your chance of injury if you:

- **DROP** down onto your hands and knees (before the earthquake knocks you down). This position protects you from falling but allows you to still move if necessary.
- **COVER** your head and neck (and your entire body if possible) under a sturdy table or desk. If there is no shelter nearby, only then should you get down near an interior wall (or next to low-lying furniture that won't fall on you), and cover your head and neck with your arms and hands.
- **HOLD ON** to your shelter (or to your head and neck) until the shaking stops. Be prepared to move with your shelter if the shaking shifts it around.



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