

ABSTRACT: The Ashkenazi Committee Report on Earthquake Protection Policy Change in Israeli Schools

Background

A national expert committee led by Prof. Isaac Ashkenazi was established in 2010 by the Israeli Ministerial Committee on National Earthquake Preparedness to re-examine earthquake protection instructions in schools and kindergartens. The committee published its conclusions in February 2011 and included experts in structural engineering, mass casualty disasters, search and rescue, medicine, geology, education, sociology, and communications.

Problem Identified

The existing "**Drop, Cover and Hold On**" policy was found to be ineffective and potentially dangerous:

- School desks cannot withstand collapse of heavy concrete building elements
- Kindergartens: Limited number of lightweight plastic tables
- Policy designed for light construction (wood) not concrete buildings prevalent in Israel
- ~50% of schools built before earthquake-resistant building codes (1980)

Revolutionary Decision

The committee recommended adopting a "**differential approach**" with priority order:

1. **Flee to open space** – within 15 seconds if possible
2. **Enter protected space** (shelter) – if immediate evacuation impossible
3. **Enter stairwell** – and continue descending to exit building
4. **Take cover under desk** – only as last resort

International Scientific Basis

Research on human behavior during earthquakes showed:

- **Japan:** 27.7% instinctively fled outside during earthquakes
- **Italy:** 38% evacuated buildings during Umbria-March earthquake
- Study of 1,380 earthquake survivors proved: fleeing outside safer than taking cover

Implementation Strategy

- **2011 to present:** Policy change in all educational institutions without preconditions
- **National Expansion:** New guidelines adopted for entire Israeli population
- **Escape Plans:** Survey of each institution to determine evacuation routes and safe spaces
- **Signage:** Mark every area with signs directing to appropriate safe location
- **Training:** Drills at least twice yearly + annual training by Home Front Command

Current Status (2025)

All earthquake protection guidelines in Israel are now based on the Ashkenazi Committee conclusions:

- All drills in educational institutions follow the differential approach
- National population guidelines reflect the same principles
- Home Front Command training based on committee recommendations
- Israeli policy serves as model for other countries

Global Impact

The Israeli committee's decision was published in international academic research and serves as a model for re-examining protection guidelines in other countries, emphasizing the importance of adapting instructions to local conditions.

Report Status: Official ministerial-level recommendation (2011) that changed national policy aimed at saving the lives of an entire generation of children.

Today (2025), this report forms the foundation for all earthquake protection guidelines in Israel.