

**WESTERN STATES SEISMIC POLICY COUNCIL  
POLICY RECOMMENDATION 09-2**

**Developing Earthquake Risk-Reduction Strategies**

**Policy Recommendation 09-2**

WSSPC strongly encourages states and local governments to develop and continually update long-term, comprehensive statewide and community-level earthquake risk-reduction strategies as part of an all-hazards plan to reduce injury, loss of life, property damage and economic disruption from earthquakes.

Comprehensive statewide and local plans and strategies should include the following elements:

- Assessment of all seismic hazards to quantify and define the risk to communities;
- Implementation of land-use and development policies to reduce exposure to earthquake hazards;
- Adoption and enforcement of the International Building Codes for the seismic design, inspection, and construction of new buildings and structures;
- Adoption of the International Existing Building Code for the maintenance and retrofit of seismically “at risk” structures;
- Development and implementation of retrofit, redevelopment, grant, and abatement programs to help strengthen existing structures, where necessary;
- Support of continuing public-education efforts and public/private partnerships to raise awareness of seismically induced threats and build constituent support for earthquake hazard reduction programs.

WSSPC encourages its partners to seek potential outreach activities, mitigation plan development, or construction projects, some of which may be eligible for funding through FEMA’s various mitigation program grants. These efforts complement FEMA’s Pre-Disaster Mitigation initiatives.

**Background**

Given the high seismic activity in the western United States, Pacific territories, and Canada, mitigation of earthquake hazards is a common interest among all the western states, territories, and provinces. FEMA’s Report 366b, (April 2008), *HAZUS-MH Estimated Annualized Earthquake Losses for the United States*, clearly shows that the western states are most at risk, with 84% of the

nation's estimated annual dollar losses from earthquakes. WSSPC, as a consortium of 13 western states, 3 Pacific territories, and a Canadian territory and province, is the ideal organization to promote the benefits of earthquake risk-mitigation policies, to promote collaboration among its members and the federal government, and to share mitigation successes between WSSPC and other organizations. From its inception, WSSPC has strongly supported reduction of losses from seismic events through policy recommendations and annual conferences.

The benefits of proper mitigation and planning is highlighted by cost/ benefit studies that show for every FEMA dollar spent on mitigation, four dollars are saved in reduced disaster relief. In addition, FEMA grants to mitigate natural hazards are expected to save lives and injuries in future events (Multihazard Mitigation Council, 2005, *Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves: An Independent Study to Assess the Future Savings from Mitigation Activities*).

Private and public organizations are encouraged to form partnerships that will develop earthquake risk-mitigation plans and risk-reduction strategies that will benefit local communities. Mitigation policies and activities are long-term, multifaceted processes where effective coordination, collaboration and communication among partners are critical. For example, the many Seismic Safety Boards and Commissions that have been created in WSSPC partner states are critical in the effort to educate state and local policymakers as to the importance of sound seismic hazard policy.

It is the responsibility and duty of the geological hazards community to organize and disseminate key information concerning proper seismic hazards mitigation. Safe communities and infrastructure can only be accomplished through diligent, informed, and coordinated effort of both regulators and stakeholders. WSSPC will continue to play a key role in that organization and communication effort.

### **Facilitation and Communication**

This policy recommendation will be sent to all identified policy and decision makers (elected officials, heads of key departments, such as emergency managers, building officials and planners and chairs of the State Seismic Safety Commissions and Boards) as well as to WSSPC representatives in the member states. Policymakers' decision to support earthquake risk mitigation and foster partnerships is the key to effective mitigation in their state.

## **Assessment**

Successes in policy implementation are occasions when mitigation actions or requirements are incorporated into public policies and decisions, and subsequently integrated into important public or private projects.

This statement of earthquake risk-reduction strategies should be adopted by all WSSPC partners. Successes should be submitted in a timely manner to WSSPC for posting on its website.

## **History**

Policy Recommendation 03-1 was first adopted by unanimous vote of the WSSPC membership at the Annual Business Meeting September 24, 2003. It was reviewed, revised, and re-adopted as WSSPC Policy Recommendation 06-1 by unanimous vote of the WSSPC membership at the WSSPC Annual Business Meeting April 17, 2006. It was reviewed, revised, and re-adopted as WSSPC Policy Recommendation 09-2 by unanimous vote of the WSSPC membership at the WSSPC Annual Business Meeting February 11, 2009.