

WSSPC Awards in Excellence 2003

Award Category: Mitigation Efforts (1 of 3 Winners)

Program Name: Improving Natural Gas Safety in Earthquakes

Administering Agency: California Seismic Safety Commission

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Fires following earthquakes are serious threats in most western states. However, information and advice on how to reduce and manage that risk was lacking. While the State of California already regulates the safety of natural gas systems and certifies earthquake-actuated shutoff and excess flow valves, the State did not have a clear policy on conditions when such valves are warranted and appropriate for use. A few pioneering cities have already passed ordinances requiring the installation of such valves. Policymakers and valve advocates asked that California consider mandating their use statewide.

The California Seismic Safety Commission, in cooperation with the American Society of Civil Engineers, formed a Committee on Natural Gas Safety with 21 volunteers from various disciplines and government agencies to develop a consensus on information about the risks, potential benefits, and drawbacks associated with ways to limit post-earthquake fire ignitions related to natural gas. The Commission refined and adopted the Committee's recommendations, presented copies to the State Legislature, and made copies available to other state and local government agencies and the general public. The State Legislature enacted a law requiring the Department of Housing and Community Development to consider changes to the California Building Standards Code. The Commission also updated its *Homeowner's Guide to Earthquake Safety* and, with the cooperation of the real estate industry, is disseminating the new gas safety advice to homebuyers in California.

The Committee developed a draft report titled, *Improving Natural Gas Safety in Earthquakes* and a two-page insert for the *Homeowner's Guide to Earthquake Safety*. The report is written for local and state government agencies that might be considering ways to improve natural gas safety in their jurisdictions. The two-page addition to the homeowner's guide is a brief non-technical summary of the larger report's key findings. Both are available to the public for free downloads at www.seismic.ca.gov or in hardcopy.