

FSSS NEWS

•Families for School Seismic Safety •

December 2006

What's New:

It's been over two years since the premier announced at Whistler that the government would upgrade all seismically at-risk BC schools within 15 years, at a cost of \$1.5 billion.

That announcement was welcome news, but FSSS remains concerned that rising construction costs and bureaucratic hold ups — such as due diligence reviews of projects in progress — may put kids at risk by delaying the upgrades. According to the Ministry's 2004 assessment, there are 311 schools in BC at risk of sustaining severe damage to structural elements in the event of a moderate to strong earthquake.

Upgrade and replacement projects are being delayed all over the province. In the Vancouver School District, most of the district's first 16 approved projects already appear to be at least a year behind schedule while the district and province work out funding and project approval processes.

To ensure all schools are brought up to life-safety standards on schedule, despite rising costs, FSSS has written to the Premier and Education Minister asking for them to work with school districts and the Association of Engineers and Geoscientists of BC (APEG), to develop a long-term, strategic plan for the school seismic upgrade program.

The plan must include:

- Clear construction timelines for each school
- Transparent annual public reporting on progress of the school seismic upgrades

- All upgrades and/or replacements must be completed by 2019, and the plan must reflect that.

We also reiterated our position that school seismic safety be regarded as an infrastructure issue that does not compete for education funding. We encourage the provincial government to work with the federal government to include schools as part of the national infrastructure and to provide seismic upgrade funding under the National Disaster Mitigation Program.

“Governments must act now to reduce the devastating impact of disasters on their citizens, especially their children. Strengthening school buildings and educating students about how to prepare for disasters will save lives.” — UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, October 2006

How you can help

- Write your MLA
- Contact your school trustees
- Ask your PAC to send a letter to your MLA, the Premier and/or the Education Minister.
- Check out the FSSS website for information and ideas — www.fsssbc.org
- Sign up for our FSSS email list to stay informed - send your email address to ksmolik@shaw.ca

In the aftermath of collapse of Francesco Iovine Primary School, Molise, Italy, Halloween 2002:

The question is why, again and again, even in developed nations, with a wealth of engineering expertise, schools would collapse in earthquakes . . . Every, that is EVERY school should be inspected and where necessary reinforced. This is so basic to risk mitigation in a seismically active area, it seems foolish to have to write it down.

(Ben Wisner – Benfield Hazard Research Institute)

In the aftermath of the disproportionate failure of school buildings in Chi-Chi Taiwan 1999

"The Chi-Chi earthquake exposed the vulnerability of technologically advanced society to damage and loss. Some of the lessons, such as the importance of building earthquake-resistant schools continue to be relearned despite the best advice of scientists and engineers."

(William Ellsworth, 2004 – US Geological Survey)

OECD Experts Recommendations on global issue of school seismic safety

"The motivation for school seismic safety is much broader than the universal human instinct to protect and love children. The education of children is essential to maintaining free societies . . . most nations make education compulsory. A state requirement for compulsory education, while allowing the continued use of seismically unsafe buildings, is an unjustifiable practice. School seismic safety initiatives are based on the premise that the very future of society is dependent upon the safety of the children of the world."

Paris Feb 2004 – Tucker et al OECD school seismic safety experts group

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has issued recommendations to member nations on the subject of school seismic safety.

For OECD resolution on school seismic safety see:

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/45/31968539.pdf>

Capital comment

While \$1.5 billion over 15 years sounds like a lot of money, in comparison with historical provincial funding for education capital projects, \$100 million a year is relatively modest. For example, in 1994/5 school year, the ministry of education approved \$518 million in capital projects (that's more than a third of the budget for the entire 15-year seismic upgrade program!), in 1998/99 it was \$525 million, 1999/2000 it was 512.6 million and in 2000/01 it was \$450 million.

Check out

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/capitalplanning/resources/cap_budg.htm for more info.

Current spending levels have been around \$200-250 – and the seismic commitment adds another \$100 million per year for 15 years. It seems that if anything – the spending has dropped since the commitment was made and the pace of work has slowed.

FSSS in the news:

Check out this online version of a Vancouver Courier article:

<http://www.vancourier.com/issues06/102106/news/102106nn7.html>

Questions or comments?

Email FSSS newsletter editor Patti Bacchus at pbbacchus@shaw.ca

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