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Governor

State of Utah

UTAH SEISMIC SAFETY COMMISSION

PETER W. MCDONOUGH
Chair

NEWS RELEASE

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NEW USSC CHAIR TO TACKLE SEISMIC SAFETY OF UTAH'S SCHOOLS

At its July 16 meeting, the Utah Seismic Safety Commission (USSC) elected Roger Evans as the new chair. Roger represents the Utah League of Cities of Towns on the USSC and is currently the Plans Examiner/Deputy Building Official for Park City. Roger previously served as director of Building Services and Inspections for Salt Lake City (1988–2003) and vice chair for the USSC (2007–2009). Roger will replace Peter McDonough of Questar, who served as the USSC chair for four years.

As chair of the USSC, Roger Evans plans to reduce Utah's earthquake risk by advocating for improved seismic safety in Utah schools.

The majority of Utah's schools lie close to the Wasatch fault and within a zone of high seismic risk. However, numerous schools are potentially unsafe as they were constructed prior 1975, when seismic regulations became a significant part of the earthquake design provisions of the 1973 Uniform Building Code.

An informal survey in 2006 revealed that 58 percent of K-12 public schools responding to the survey (43 percent of all Utah schools) were constructed before 1975. Schools constructed prior to 1975 may have unreinforced masonry (brick and mortar) construction, which is not capable of withstanding even moderate earthquake shaking. Unreinforced masonry buildings (or URMs) are prone to collapse in strong earthquakes and would account for large losses in Wasatch Front earthquake-hazard assessments.

The USSC and the Structural Engineers Association of Utah (SEAU) have been pursuing a means to fund a seismic-hazard inventory for all Utah schools over the past two legislative sessions (2008-2009). However, efforts thus far have proved unsuccessful. A seismic-hazard inventory would help identify those schools most vulnerable in an earthquake. The USSC and SEAU intend to pursue funding for the seismic inventory in future legislative sessions and are applying for a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) earthquake-program grant to create a sample inventory that would help define the problem.

A sample inventory is an important first step in estimating the vulnerability of Utah's schools to earthquakes. Ten percent of Utah's public schools from selected districts would be physically screened using a FEMA guideline called rapid visual screening. The screening would include the date of construction and any additions or alterations, and whether any seismic rehabilitation has been done on the school. This proposed pilot study would (1) gather preliminary information about the state of Utah's existing schools, which would help local and state officials advocate for improved seismic safety; (2) provide tangible support for future legislative efforts; and (3) provide important educational opportunities for the general public and other states interested in pursuing similar mitigation efforts.

More information on earthquake hazards in Utah is available in the recent USSC publication called *Putting Down Roots in Earthquake Country – Your Handbook for Earthquakes in Utah* (available at ussc.utah.gov). The USSC is a 15-member commission created by the Utah State Legislature and charged with reviewing and assessing Utah's earthquake-related hazards and risks, providing information on earthquake safety, and promoting earthquake loss-reduction measures. The SEAU is a member organization established to help promote and protect public safety.

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