



PRESS RELEASE

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Structural Engineers Urge California Governor to Support Hospital Upgrades for Public Safety

January 24, 2011 – Sacramento, CA – The Structural Engineers Association of California, (www.SEAOC.org), the leading association of practicing structural engineers in the State with nearly 3,000 members, urges the new California governor to make upgrading hospitals a priority and not cut funding for this effort.

In the letter addressed to Governor Jerry Brown, SEAOC president Stephen Pelham wrote, “SEAOC is very concerned with assuring that we continue funding to upgrade our hospitals and to make them sufficiently resilient to withstand the next earthquake. We realize that our budget problems are dire, but public safety concerns must remain at the forefront in a state as seismically active as California.

“Scientists have been telling us for decades that a major quake on any one of the major fault lines, including the San Andreas Fault, is imminent,” he continued, “and now they are telling us that it is long overdue. While we don’t know exactly when the next major quake will hit or how many people will be injured, we do know that all of our medical facilities must be ready to meet the needs of the 36 million Californians. The question is: “Are California hospitals ready?” The answer is: “Not completely.”

The last major temblor in California, the Northridge Quake, which hit during January in 1994, damaged 12 hospitals in the Los Angeles region – an alarming number. As a result, medical professionals were greatly compromised and challenged in their efforts to treat the 9,000

individuals who were injured in that quake -- not to mention the thousands of individuals already hospitalized and receiving treatment for other illnesses and accidents.

“Following the 1994 Northridge Quake, California officials passed SB 1953 demanding that, by 2013 – just two years away -- all hospitals deemed hazardous and/or at risk of collapse or significant loss of life in a quake be replaced or retrofitted to a higher seismic safety standard,” Mr. Pelham noted. “In the past 16 years, California has fixed many of the weakest hospitals and built new ones where retrofitting didn’t make sense. Plus, structural engineers have developed better and more cost-effective solutions to upgrade existing hospitals and to design new ones. But, lately, things have bogged down.”

Mr. Pelham pointed out that California’s Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD) has suffered as part of past state budget cost reductions. OSHPD, the agency that is the essential “gatekeeper” for assuring California hospitals are safe and properly designed, is now forced to complete more work with fewer resources and look for more and more shortcuts. “While they have instituted several innovations to meet hospital owners’ review demands -- including introducing a streamlined compliance review for small projects and a “Phased Plan Review” process for larger ones -- they must be given the necessary resources to keep the review process going.

“Don’t shortchange OSHPD,” he exclaimed. “With the passing of time, the potential risk of earthquake damage to California hospitals grows. Given the continuous warning by scientists on the imminence of our next big quake, we must move quickly and expeditiously to make sure all of our hospitals are ready,” he concluded.

The Structural Engineers Association of California (www.seaoc.org) is a nonprofit organization of nearly 3000 members dedicated to advancing the structural engineering profession, protecting public safety in the built environment and serving the business and professional needs of the membership.

For more information or an interview, contact Patricia Coate, Media Contact for SEAOC at 503-336-4151 or Stephen Pelham, President of SEAOC at 916.418.9100