

Earthquake prone buildings

While it is over four years since the first earthquake struck Canterbury in 2010, the matter of earthquake-prone buildings is still one of significance to our community, especially for the owners and occupiers of older buildings. Financial institutions and other market players are increasingly including a requirement for buildings to be rated in terms of their seismic performance as part of any sale and purchase or re-insurance arrangements, with significant cost implications if no rating is present or if it is noticeably low.

The approach of Auckland Council to this matter continues to be one where we advocate for the identification and retrofitting of earthquake-prone buildings within timeframes and in ways that balance the desire to improve safety with the practicalities around cost, as well as the desire to retain as much of our historic environment as possible.

While we have completed some 6000 assessments to date, we find ourselves continuously involved in ensuring the public that they understand it as best as possible and try and prevent them from making ill-advised decisions on the future of their buildings or tenancies.

Practice Note – Seismic Upgrades

Council have a number of practice notes on our website; these practice notes are designed to assist designers, practitioners and homeowners by providing guidance.

We have recently developed a new practice note, which provides guidance information to building owners and designers who are considering seismic upgrades to existing buildings.

The aim of the Building Act 2004 is to reduce the risks that earthquakes pose to people and buildings. Buildings designed after 1976 are unlikely to be earthquake prone unless they have a critical structural weakness from a design deficiency or unauthorised alteration.

Earthquake strengthening of buildings leads to immediate and long-term benefits, which accrue to building owners, occupiers, insurers and the wider society.

Benefits include:

- reduced death, injury and property damage costs resulting from earthquakes
- reduced social costs and impacts associated with earthquakes
- improved post-earthquake functioning of towns and cities and reduced economic losses

Some of these benefits are difficult to quantify, but they can be very significant, as has become clear following the Canterbury earthquakes.

Owners of buildings that are registered as earthquake prone buildings are required to upgrade their buildings to comply with at least 34% (or more) of the National Building Standards.

For these reasons, where an owner voluntarily chooses to upgrade a building because it has been identified, as being earthquake prone, although an assessment under s.112 is required, the owner will not have to upgrade the building **unless** it is identified that it is substantially lacking in one or both of the following features:-

1. means of escape from fire
2. access and facilities for persons with disabilities

For further information please refer to our [website](#)