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CALIFORNIA SCHOOL BUILDINGS INVENTORIED FOR SEISMIC SAFETY

Vast Majority of Structures Found Safe

Sacramento - The Department of General Services' Division of the State Architect (DSA) today released an inventory of schools that found the vast majority of California's kindergarten through 12th grade public school buildings meet expected life safety performance standards and would protect children from injury during a serious earthquake.

An estimated 80 percent of California's K-12 school facility space would protect life safety and does not require further seismic evaluation, the DSA report found. The seismic safety inventory also identified 7,537 school buildings, which represent 14 percent of the state's K-12 school building's square footage, that should undergo additional seismic evaluation to determine if they should be retrofitted. Additionally, the inventory identified more than 2,100 school buildings that are expected, but not guaranteed, to achieve life safety performance in future earthquakes.

"California's school children have been protected by seismic regulations that have been the strongest in the nation since 1933," said California State Architect Stephan Castellanos. "As we have learned more about how to improve seismic safety, the state consistently has strengthened these regulations over time, and we will continue to strengthen these regulations, take action, and protect schoolchildren in the future."

The report, Seismic Safety Inventory of California Public Schools, which was required by Assembly Bill 300 (Chapter 622, Statutes of 1999), was prepared by the Division of the State Architect, in consultation with the Seismic Safety Commission.

The inventory focused on non-wood frame public schools that were designed and built before July 1, 1978 and met certain criteria, including close proximity to an active earthquake fault. Since 1933, California schools have had to meet the seismic safety requirements of the Field Act, which established a procedure to be followed in the design, construction, or alteration of public school buildings. Substantial improvements in the seismic design of buildings were incorporated into the 1976 Uniform Building Code.

The inventory placed school buildings into two categories: (1) building types that are likely to perform well, and are expected (but not guaranteed) to achieve life safety performance in earthquakes, and (2) building types that are not expected to perform as well in earthquakes, and should undergo more detailed seismic evaluation to determine if they can be expected to achieve life safety performance.

"The compilation of this inventory represents only the beginning of an on-going process to further ensure the safety of non-wood frame buildings on school campuses," said Castellanos. "It forms the foundation for further investigations, on-site visits, and strategies for mitigation."

Castellanos emphasized that non-wood frame buildings, under most conditions, are not in any immediate danger. "Risk is a measure of a large number of factors, including the duration and severity of an earthquake, proximity to an active fault, and building design."

He noted that the passage of Proposition 47 provides the opportunity for local school districts, in need of seismic retrofits, to apply for school modernization funds.

"Partnerships with local school districts will be the key to ensuring the safety of California school children," said Castellanos. "We look forward to working with school districts to analyze this data and to mitigate potential risks."

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(Editor note: the Seismic Safety Inventory was formerly online at:
<http://www.legi.dgs.ca.gov/Publications/2002LegislativeReports.html>)