

Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries

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February 17, 2006

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Schools and other critical facilities statewide to be assessed for seismic safety

An ambitious statewide program to assess the seismic safety of schools, community colleges, fire stations, police stations, and acute care hospitals is underway by the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI).

Portland, Oregon: With the passage of 4 bills by the Oregon legislature in August, 2005, a landmark step in helping improve earthquake safety for Oregon's public schools and emergency facilities has been reached.

The bills' sponsor, Senate President Peter Courtney (D-Salem/Gervais/Woodburn), has said of the legislation, "As Oregonians, we face the very real threat of a severe earthquake just off our coast, like the earthquake and tsunami that hit Indian Ocean nations last December. Communities throughout our state also have earthquake faults. We must prepare ourselves in many ways, including protecting schoolchildren and strengthening emergency responses."

These new public policies ([Senate Bills 2,3,4&5](#)) begin with a systematic, statewide needs assessment of critical emergency response buildings and public schools that will suggest to local jurisdictions which facilities are more at risk and should be strengthened to withstand damaging earthquakes:

Senate Bill 2 directs the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries to assess the earthquake safety of schools, colleges, police and fire stations and hospitals statewide.

Senate Bill 3 directs the Oregon Office of Emergency Management to create a grant program for local communities to strengthen the most vulnerable schools and emergency service buildings. Grants would be funded by state general obligation bonds Oregon voters authorized in 2002.

Senate Bills 4 and 5 directs the state treasurer to issue voter approved bonds.

Senate Bill 2 is the first step of this pre-disaster mitigation strategy and the legislature has provided \$598,000 in General Funds for the project, with the completion of the assessments and published report due by July, 2007.

It is estimated that about 2,250 facilities qualify for the needs assessment state wide, led by K-12 with 1,020 schools. Senate Bill 2 states that DOGAMI should assess schools having a capacity of 250 or more persons and are regularly used for student activities. In the absence of detailed capacity estimates for each school, DOGAMI has selected schools for assessment based upon a minimum student enrollment of 200

as of October 2004. In addition, DOGAMI will ensure that at least 90% of enrolled public school students in every county are part of the assessment, and 100% of the highly vulnerable coastal community schools will be assessed.

These assessments will touch every corner of the state and will require DOGAMI to visit 1,500 sites to survey schools and critical facilities using a process called [Rapid Visual Screening \(RVS\)](#) that was developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

An initial challenge of the project is locating the actual physical facilities as there is no single database that identifies where all the critical facilities are located in the state. When this part of the project is done, a statewide database will have been created that can be used by all state and local governments.

The rapid visual screening evaluations will be combined with other vital information about the buildings, such as the type of soil and rock the building is built upon, to rank the facilities into risk categories based on need. This will help the Seismic Rehabilitation Grant Committee (established with SB 3) administer grant programs for the disbursement of funds for seismic rehabilitation (SB 4 & 5). DOGAMI will meet with County Emergency Managers and other officials about the seismic needs assessments in the near future.

DOGAMI's partners on the implementation of the seismic needs assessment program include The Seismic Safety Policy Advisory Commission, Oregon Office of Emergency Management, Oregon Department of Human Services, Oregon State Board of Education, Oregon State Board of Higher Education and representatives of the emergency response community.

"We are very pleased to begin moving this program along. The seismic needs assessment and the database will assist communities with improving their preparedness for earthquake hazards and for Oregon to continue to be a leader in disaster prevention", said Vicki S. McConnell, State Geologist.

In the next few weeks, DOGAMI will launch a website with progress reports and more detailed information on this project. You may also contact James Roddey at 800 NE Oregon St., Portland, OR 97232, (971) 673-1543 or cell phone at (503) 807-8343.

The Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries is an independent agency of the State, and has a broad responsibility in developing a geologic understanding of natural hazards. We then make this information available to communities and individuals to help reduce the risks from earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides, floods and volcanic eruptions. We assist in the formulation of state policy where understanding of geologic materials, geologic resources, processes, and hazards are key to decision-making. The Department is also the lead state regulatory agency for mining, oil, gas and geothermal exploration, production and reclamation.

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