

Introduction

The purpose of this manual is to assist interested states, coalitions of states, or confederations of local governments to develop and nurture seismic safety advisory boards. The first part contains "how-to" tips and advice to assist states that already have such panels in upgrading their advisory boards.

The second part of the manual contains advice on strategic planning for improving seismic safety. Specifically, it includes guidelines for developing a model seismic risk management program by which to gauge progress.

A seismic safety advisory board is a multi-disciplinary panel composed of volunteers with expertise in fields related to earthquakes and preparation for and response to earthquakes, such as earth sciences, engineering, emergency services, local government, social services, and public policy. They are drawn from the private sector, academia, and government. The board's functions are to:

- Advise the legislature and administrative agencies
- Advocate earthquake programs
- Promote improvements to seismic safety and procedures
- Identify seismic hazards
- Coordinate plans and actions of responsible agencies, programs, and government levels
- Gather, integrate, and transfer information from a wide range of sources
- Plan for the long-term implementation, review, and maintenance of seismic safety programs

EARTHQUAKES ARE POSSIBLE
IN VIRTUALLY ALL PARTS OF
THE UNITED STATES. EVERY
STATE SHOULD BE PREPARED.

The need for seismic safety advisory boards and for model seismic risk management programs is based on the following assumptions:

- A damaging earthquake can occur with little or no warning. With each passing year, the potential for one increases.
- Positive, goal-oriented leadership is a prerequisite to starting an effective advisory board.
- Organizations at many levels of government and in the private sector have responsibilities in seismic safety. The board can help develop comprehensive and consistent programs for seismic safety and risk management.
- Earthquakes can cause extensive property damage and endanger lives, but this risk can be reduced and managed by prudent policies for locating and designing structures.
- Managing earthquake risks has collateral benefits, bringing about improved buildings, dams, transportation facilities, building stock, communications, fire safety, toxic materials management, and emergency response.
- Concerted efforts bring long-term progress toward seismic safety.

For most states seismic safety is a new need crammed onto an already full agenda. As a result, it is not being addressed by a statewide governmental program in a majority of states. Earthquakes occur less frequently than other disasters, such as floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes. Consequently, the time, expense, and effort of contending with seismic safety concerns must often be weighed against the probability—the "odds"—that a major earthquake will not occur in a decade or even within a generation.

Making progress in reducing and managing earthquakes risk requires a long-term commitment. Many of the planning issues addressed in this manual are also involved in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from other types of disasters. Therefore, the creation and maintenance of the board will also help enhance general emergency preparation, response, and recovery plans. The cost of reducing risk and strengthening emergency response capabilities is more than justified in view of the cost of damage, repair, and rehabilitation—that is, the cost of not preparing. In this case, a “stitch” in time saves money and lives.

This manual is meant to help in the creation of a seismic safety advisory board—either as an autonomous agency

or as part of an existing entity. It provides advice gained from dealing with existing hazards and offers options to consider when establishing a new board or revitalizing an existing board to meet the unique needs of a region.

The board will provide access to expertise, giving government as well as the private sector help in focusing attention on earthquake-related issues. Although this manual attempts to create “perfect” boards, it allows room to select from options and do what is necessary to establish a board and get it underway. Without the seismic safety advisory board, state and local governments are ill-equipped to develop consistent and comprehensive programs for improving safety and reducing risks.