

FEMA and Utah Release Unreinforced Masonry Risk Reduction Strategy Guide for Local Communities

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DENVER – Nearly one year after the damaging earthquake centered around Magna, FEMA and the state of Utah are releasing a strategy to address the risks posed to unreinforced masonry structures. The document, *Wasatch Front Unreinforced Masonry Risk Reduction Strategy*, provides guidance to Utah communities on how to identify their own risk and then take steps to address it.

The five recommendations made in the strategy include the Unreinforced Masonry School Risk Reduction Program, Retrofit Program Focused on Government-Owned Unreinforced Masonry Structures, Statewide Unreinforced Masonry Risk Reduction Program, Utah State Construction Code Enhancements, and Utah State Construction Code – Local Amendments. The full document will be available online at www.fema.gov.

Unreinforced masonry was a common building material throughout Utah up until seismic building codes became more prevalent in the 1970s. These brittle brick buildings do not incorporate the reinforcing steel required by modern building codes. There are an estimated 140,000 such structures across the state. They encompass a wide variety of buildings, from individual homes, to businesses, to schools and houses of worship. Such structures can more easily succumb to the movement and shaking during an earthquake, posing a threat to building occupants as well as individuals outside in close proximity to the structures.

The *Wasatch Front Unreinforced Masonry Risk Reduction Strategy* is a direct result of an earthquake summit in Salt Lake City in June 2019. The overarching goal includes accelerating statewide progress on mitigation of unreinforced masonry structures. The purpose of the summit was to raise awareness about the risk of unreinforced masonry buildings, identify mitigation opportunities and brainstorm funding solutions. More than 100 participants from across the public and private sectors participated in the two-day event. One need identified by



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participants included a resource guide for local communities to use and implement solutions.

FEMA and the state of Utah recognize the importance of mitigation in reducing exposure to future losses from disasters. The interagency National Mitigation Investment Strategy— published in August 2019 — was developed to help the nation be more intentional about setting resilience and mitigation investment priorities to benefit the whole community., The *Wasatch Front Unreinforced Masonry Risk Reduction Strategy* was selected as a pilot project for this national effort in recognition of Utah’s acknowledgement of a serious seismic risk and dedication to finding a solution.

While this product was developed for communities across the Wasatch Front, it also is replicable. Its collaborative approach is intended to support and guide the development of unreinforced masonry risk reduction programs across the United States. The strategy has been written to provide state and local policymakers with a clear list of actions to take as soon as possible, through policy and with budgeting, legislation, and executive actions, as appropriate. Implementation of the suggested actions will help to make our communities more resilient and save lives and property in the process.

