

Earthquake-Prone Buildings - Frequently Asked Questions

How does New Zealand manage earthquake-prone buildings?

A new national system for managing earthquake-prone buildings (EPB) in New Zealand came into effect on 1 July, 2017. The system affects owners of earthquake-prone buildings, engineers, other building professionals and building users. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment oversees the system, while councils administer the assessment and compliance processes.

What does being earthquake-prone actually mean?

A building, or part of a building, is earthquake-prone if it will have its ultimate capacity exceeded in a moderate earthquake, and if it were to collapse, would do so in a way that is likely to cause injury or death to people in or near the building or on any other property, or damage to any other property.

What is this Council's role?

As an owner of many buildings, Whakatāne District Council is subject to the same legislative building requirements as other building owners within New Zealand. In addition, Council has a regulatory role to administer the legislation throughout the district. The Government has rules and guidance when it comes to the seismic strength of buildings. Council's role is to determine if a building or part of a building is earthquake-prone using the New Building Standard (NBS) rating methodology. We then have to ensure that owners strengthen any of the buildings that are earthquake-prone within the timeframes specified in the legislation.

What are earthquake ratings?

Engineering assessments include a number of assumptions that engineers are required to consider and document. Consequently, any NBS score contains elements of uncertainty and, for this reason, it is preferable to use a range rather than an absolute number to describe a building's rating. The New Zealand Society of Earthquake Engineering (NZSEE) developed the following system to describe the level of risk that each grade represents.

As the earthquake-prone focus of the Building Act is only on those buildings with a NBS of less than 34 percent, the legislation references Grades D and E. The wider property market however recognises all of the grades.

Why is notification required?

The Building Act requires councils to place notices on buildings that are earthquake-prone. The purpose of the notice is to make information more freely available so that members of the public can make informed decisions.

What earthquake-strengthening work has already happened?

Earthquake-strengthening work on the Whakatāne War Memorial Hall is complete. Five additional Council-owned buildings were assessed as earthquake-prone. These have earthquake-prone building notices attached to them. The five buildings are the Te Teko War Memorial Hall, Waimana Nukuhou Hall, the Whakatāne Rugby Park Grandstand and two commercial buildings at 58 The Strand and 39 McAlister Street.

Why was the War Memorial Hall strengthened immediately, while other buildings will not?

Whakatāne District War Memorial Hall was strengthened because it also serves as a Civil Defence Evacuation Centre. The hall is a popular community venue that provides cultural and sporting facilities for many organisations around the district.

When will the other buildings be worked on?

Detailed plans have been drawn up for the strengthening of the grandstand. Engineers are also considering the strengthening needs for the Waimana-Nukuhou Hall and Te Teko War Memorial Hall. Work will be programmed to strengthen the other buildings within the 15-year timeframe.

Where can I find out more information?

For more information on the system for managing earthquake-prone buildings, go to the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's website: mbie.govt.nz.