

Quake-proofing schools could hit \$1 billion
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VANCOUVER - The provincial review of seismic safety of B.C. schools is nearly complete. And early estimates put the cost of earthquake-proofing schools across the province at up to \$1 billion.

According to the Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of B.C., more than 700 B.C. schools would likely not survive an earthquake.

A moderate quake brought down the roof on a school in Italy during a Halloween party in 2002. Twenty-six students and three adults died.

The 50-year-old building had been renovated – but never made earthquake proof. The experts say there's a 40 per cent chance of an earthquake worse than that one could hit B.C. within the next few decades.

So for many parents, it's not just a question of spending more money – it's spending it now, rather than later.

Dr. Tracy Monk who speaks for Families for Seismic School Safety says it's been a struggle to get the provincial government to part with the money. "I think there are two basic human rights at stake here. Children have the right to physical safety and they have the right to an education. "And it doesn't make any sense that those two basic human rights should be competing for the same funds," says Monk.

The seismic assessment is expected to be completed by October. And Monk says federal and provincial governments must then be ready to share the cost of protecting B.C. students and their schools.