

Seismic Mitigation News Coverage BC 2007

Legislature slated for face-lift

VICTORIA/CKNW (AM980) Feb, 16 2007

No one's saying yet how much it will cost, but the Provincial Government is about to lay down a whack of cash to upgrade the Legislature.

The landmark building and its outlying structures haven't been substantially upgraded since the 1970's, and are at risk of a significant collapse in the event of even a moderate earthquake.

After years of study and discussion, House Speaker Bill Barisoff wants upgrades to begin in the spring and they won't be cheap. An estimate done back in 1998 put the cost of just a seismic upgrade at 17 million dollars, "And that was in those, those numbers back then, and certainly it's going to cost a substantial number of dollars."

Mac Leans Magazine

No seismic shifts yet for B.C. schools

[If the big one hits, school's out in B.C.](#)

KEN MACQUEEN | Mar 19, 2007 |

The neighbourhood school should be a source of pride and symbol of stability. Unfortunately, in dozens of communities in seismically unstable British Columbia, schools are also a source of worry. A government audit found that 311 of 864 schools in earthquake-prone areas of the province are at high risk of severe damage in a moderate to strong earthquake. Hundreds more are vulnerable to lesser damage.

Two years ago, Gordon Campbell's Liberal government made an election promise to correct years of inaction with a \$1.5-billion program to upgrade 700 substandard schools within 15 years. Some of the most fragile schools would be repaired by 2008, said Tom Christensen, then education minister. 'We're fast-tracking seismic projects at 80 high-priority schools so that students will be protected as soon as possible.'

Since then, there's been little evidence of urgency, accomplishment or even a coherent plan, says Tracy Monk, a Vancouver family doctor and a founding director of Families for School Seismic Safety. So far, ministry figures show just four schools have been upgraded and construction continues on seven others. Another 48 haven't progressed beyond feasibility studies. No work has started on

any of the 16 Vancouver schools at high risk -- including a school attended by one of Monk's children. Seattle, in the same earthquake zone, will have completed a US\$1-billion safety upgrade of all schools by 2010.

B.C.'s current Education Minister Shirley Bond has said the work is proceeding as quickly as possible. Monk says the 15-year commitment seems a 'hollow' exercise in wishful thinking.

The province has already upgraded bridges, tunnels and prisons. The legislature in Victoria is also scheduled for seismic repairs. Monk calls it unacceptable that prisons have a higher priority than schools. Her organization is trying to press the issue with government, without unduly raising the fears of parents and children. The government is gambling a major quake won't happen soon, she says. 'How much more Russian roulette are we willing to play?'

The Sun

[Pace of upgrades attacked](#)

[Promised seismic fixes for schools 'stalled out,' group says](#)

Thursday, March 15, 2007

Two years into its pre-election promise to "fast-track" earthquake-proofing of 80 B.C. schools by 2008, the provincial government has finished just four of the projects.

The slow pace puts in jeopardy the government's ambitious, \$1.5-billion plan to do seismic upgrades of more than 700 public schools by 2019, said Tracy Monk, spokeswoman for Families for School Seismic Safety.

Monk said the government's commitment seems to have "stalled out" and is calling for more accountability about its progress on making schools more earthquake-safe for B.C. children.

"There's no way the 2019 commitment can be achieved," Monk said in an interview. "If anything, the pace of work seems to have slowed since the commitment was made."

Premier Gordon Campbell unveiled in November 2004 the \$1.5-billion pledge to upgrade schools. Four months later, then-education minister Tom Christensen promised \$254 million over three years to address the most urgent seismic risks in the system.

That "fast-tracked" list was later increased to 95 schools.

Ministry data show 47 "fast-tracked" projects are under construction or have had a feasibility study. Studies on the other 44 are underway.

Education Minister Shirley Bond said the province is moving ahead "aggressively" with its commitment. "We have \$1.5 billion [in total committed.] The projects are moving forward. We have a number that have been completed."

Asked whether it was possible to reach the goal by 2019, Bond said: "Certainly that's our intent. It's a high priority for this government."

The four upgraded schools are Gordon Head middle school in Saanich, Frank Hurt secondary in Surrey, Captain James Cook elementary in Vancouver and Westwood elementary in Coquitlam.

NDP critic David Cubberley accused the government of playing a "shell game" by mixing funding for building new schools and upgrading old ones with seismic projects.

◆ The Vancouver Sun 2007

The Times Colonist

Quake-proofing of schools 'stalled'

Only four of 95 high-risk schools done since project announced in 2004 Jeff Rud, Times Colonist

Thursday, March 15, 2007

Two years into its pre-election promise to "fast track" the quake-proofing of 80 B.C. schools by 2008, the provincial government has finished just four of the projects.

The slow pace puts in jeopardy the government's ambitious \$1.5-billion plan to seismically upgrade more than 700 public schools by 2019.

"There's no way that the 2019 commitment can be achieved," Tracy Monk, spokeswoman for Families for School Seismic Safety, said in an interview yesterday as she called for more government accountability about the process. "And in fact, if anything, the pace of work seems to have slowed down since the commitment was made. Parents are certainly confused and the program is very unclear to track."

In November 2004, Premier Gordon Campbell unveiled a \$1.5-billion pledge to upgrade B.C.'s schools. Four months later, then-education minister Tom Christensen promised \$254 million over three years to address 80 of the most urgent seismic risks.

That “fast-tracked” list was subsequently increased to 95 schools. But only four projects — Gordon Head Middle School in Saanich and three Lower Mainland schools — have been completed two-thirds of the way through that three-year promise.

Ministry data shows 47 “fast-tracked” projects are under construction or have had a feasibility study. Studies on the other 44 are underway.

Education Minister Shirley Bond said the province is moving ahead “aggressively” with its commitment. “We have every single project in the [fast-tracked group] that we announced actually going through feasibility studies.”

When asked whether it was possible to reach the goal of finishing earthquake upgrades by 2019, Bond said: “Certainly that’s our intent and that means we have to work hard. ... It’s a high priority for this government.”

But NDP critic David Cubberley accused the government of playing a “shell game” with its seismic commitment, mixing funding for building new schools and upgrading old ones with seismic projects.

“They have no transparency in the program at all, so we’re guessing as to what they’ve got done,” he said. “It looks as though [the seismic plan] is definitely being slow-walked. At times it looks as though it’s potentially parked.”

Michael McEvoy, chairman of the Greater Victoria school board, said his district has worked well with the government since 2001 to upgrade a number of schools. During the past few months, however, the province has begun reviewing the upgrade plans for schools such as Vic High, Central Middle School and Margaret Jenkins Elementary, McEvoy said. “That was, I think, an unusual step. It hasn’t been done in the past.”

The province is concerned about the rising cost of construction and wants to determine whether upgrading or rebuilding makes more sense in some cases, McEvoy said.

Vancouver Courier

Schools still on shaky ground if big one hits city anytime soon

published on 03/16/2007

By Mark Hasiuk-Staff writer

The Vancouver school board is dragging its feet on seismic upgrading and endangering the lives of students, says a concerned parent and advocate.

"It seems like a couple of years have been spent creatively moving paper back and forth and strengthening the bureaucratic process instead of school buildings," said Dr. Tracy Monk, founder of Families for School Seismic Safety. "There is a disproportionate risk for schools in the event of an earthquake and this needs to be addressed now."

In March of 2005, the province launched the B.C. Seismic Mitigation Plan, allocating \$1.5 billion dollars to upgrade the province's schools. The plan identified 80 high-risk schools including 16 in the Vancouver school district, which was allocated approximately \$400 million to be spent as individual school plans are finalized. Seismic upgrading typically involves strengthening building foundations and fortifying walls and ceilings.

But so far, only one of those 16 Vancouver schools, Cook elementary on East 54th Avenue, has been upgraded with work in its library and gymnasium.

Monk, a family practitioner and Kitsilano resident with two children in Vancouver public schools, said Vancouver school trustees are partly to blame for the "glacier-like progress" because they have not pushed for construction to move forward. "This type of issue is why we elect school trustees to advocate on behalf of parents," said Monk, adding that clearer benchmarks must be established. "It's their responsibility as elected officials to stand up and say if they feel things aren't proceeding according to plan."

NPA school board chairman Ken Denike blamed the provincial government. "They underestimated the inflation in construction costs," he said. "Three years ago, a school upgrade that might cost \$24 million is now \$40 million."

Les King, director of facilities for the Vancouver school board, echoed Denike's indictment of provincial officials. "The province did some work with engineers to define what would be the seismic criteria to bring these buildings up to code, and that took longer than expected."

Promise to earthquake-proof B.C. schools called 'hollow'

Last Updated: Friday, March 2, 2007

[CBC News](#)

A plan by the B.C. government to spend more than \$1.5 billion to upgrade schools in the province to make them earthquake-proof within 15 years was a "hollow" promise made before the last election, according to the head of Families for Seismic Upgrading.

Dr. Tracy Monk said Thursday that, from what she sees, work is proceeding no faster than it was before the announcement by Premier Gordon Campbell in 2005.

"The 15-year commitment seems hollow if the mechanisms to achieve it have not been put in place," she said.

Campbell also said 80 of the most vulnerable schools would be fast-tracked at a cost of more than \$250 million. They were to be finished within three years.

Figures from the Ministry of Education show that work has been completed on only four schools. Seven others are under construction, and feasibility studies have been done on 48.

"We are going to keep the commitments we made. We are working with the school boards. We are moving it forward as quickly as possible," Education Minister Shirley Bond said.

But NDP MLA David Cubberly said the minister isn't facing reality.

"This was a paper program to begin with. It was designed for the election campaign. She has done nothing with it," Cubberly said.

Meanwhile, B.C. children continue to attend classes in schools that could fall down in an earthquake, he said.

"Seismologists always tell us it's not a matter of if [there's an earthquake], but of when," Monk said. "Nobody knows what the hand of fate can hold but, at the end of the day, we need to be able to say we've done our best, and we had our priorities in the right place, and at the moment, I'm not sure we can say that."