

## **80 schools to get seismic upgrade Government pledges \$254 million over three years to improve earthquake readiness**

Tuesday, March 08, 2005

B.C. Education Minister Tom Christensen has promised significant seismic upgrades for about 80 schools across the province over the next three years.

Christensen pledged Monday a total of \$254 million over three years to address B.C.'s highest seismic school priorities. The Liberal government must be re-elected to deliver on that commitment.

The \$254 million represents the first installment in a \$1.5-billion seismic upgrading promise for B.C. schools over the next 15 years first offered last November by Premier Gordon Campbell.

"One of the priorities of the government has been to ensure that all B.C. children are safe at school in the event of an earthquake," Christensen said. "We'll be working together with school boards to get shovels in the ground as quickly as possible."

More than 700 B.C. schools have been identified by the province as being at risk in the event of an earthquake. Last year, the government did a complete seismic assessment of 800 schools in risk zones.

"There is everything on that list from minor work of a few thousand dollars to very significant work that is in the tens of millions of dollars," Christensen said.

Fifty-six of the 80 highest priority schools targeted in Monday's funding announcement are in the Lower Mainland. Nineteen are on Vancouver Island.

Christensen said Monday's funding is in addition to \$70-million in seismic funding announced as part of last year's capital plan.

As well, Christensen said some seismic funding will be included in his ministry's three-year capital plan to be announced later this spring. That will be funding to projects that are largely "renovation-based" but might also include some seismic work.

Although the government has pledged to upgrade all B.C. schools that need it within 15 years, Christensen said he's optimistic all the high-priority projects can be done within 10 years.

NDP house leader Joy MacPhail accused the government of trying to buy support with Monday's announcement after cancelling the previous government's seismic mitigation program earlier in their mandate.

"In fact, the B.C. Liberals inherited a very solid, well thought-out seismic upgrading program from the previous administration and they cancelled that," MacPhail said.

"Once again, the Liberal government is trying to buy peoples' love . . . They put people at risk through their own actions and now they want to say: 'Oh we're your protector.' I don't think people will buy it. "

But Christensen said the Liberal program is a "more comprehensive look" at solving the problem of seismic safety.

"Certainly, nobody would be happier than me if the previous government had started to do this 10 years ago," he said. "We've known about the seismic risk for a long, long time and we're the first government to take a comprehensive look at it."

#### FIRST SCHOOLS TO BE SEISMICALLY UPGRADED:

The province pledged Monday a total of \$254 million over the next three years to make seismic upgrades to 80 schools across B.C. Fifty-six of the highest-priority schools are on the Lower Mainland.

Map with the locations of schools to be seismically upgraded at:

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/capitalplanning/seismic/update.pdf>