
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

New office to accelerate school seismic projects

VICTORIA – A proposed new project office in the Vancouver school district will help speed up the delivery of school seismic projects aimed at keeping students and staff safe in the event of an earthquake.

Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the Ministry of Education proposes to work with the Vancouver board of education (VBE) to create a co-governed project office staffed by professional personnel dedicated to overseeing seismic projects in the Vancouver school district (SD 39). The office will provide SD 39 access to additional, specialized resources to accelerate progress on seismic upgrades. As soon as the MOU is signed by the chair of the VBE and the Minister of Education, a steering committee will be formed to hire a director who will then be responsible for establishing the office.

A co-governance model will support closer working relationships to help accelerate decision making and project delivery. The new office will help ensure Seismic Mitigation Program (SMP) funding is clearly focused on seismic upgrades and help the VBE make better use of the excess capacity in their facilities, as the district currently has up to 9,000 empty school seats.

Currently, there are 69 schools in SD 39 that have been assessed by the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists BC as having high seismic risk. Given the complexity and significant number of projects in SD 39, combined with the need to maximize the number of safety upgrades within the available program funding, there is a unique need and opportunity in SD 39 to address these projects in a more timely and cost-effective manner through a specialized seismic office.

The Province first communicated to the VBE its request for a specialized office in the spring of 2012. In early 2014, the Ministry of Education reengaged the VBE and held detailed discussions on the scope and purpose of the specialized seismic office.

Through the Seismic Mitigation Program, the Province has committed more than \$1 billion over the next 10 years to support school seismic projects throughout B.C. Of the 69 high risk schools in Vancouver, there are currently five in design or under construction and a further 24 projects the Province has committed to fund through the Seismic Mitigation Program. While SMP funding remains available and the provincial government remains committed to the 24 supported projects, the Province is not in a position to proceed with final approvals and funding until the MOU is in place.

Quotes:

Peter Fassbender, Minister of Education –

“The safety of students and staff is paramount. There is a critical mass of seismic projects in Vancouver and the specific circumstances there call for a more focused and specialized approach.”

“The Government of B.C. and the Vancouver board of education have shared responsibilities for completing capital projects so I’m inviting them to join us in building a stronger, more cooperative process.”

“The B.C. government is accountable to taxpayers and we need to deliver as many seismic upgrades as possible, as soon as possible, within the funding available through our award-winning Seismic Mitigation Program.”

“The MOU that we’ve developed reflects the principles that I’ve discussed with the chair of the Vancouver board of education. I hope that we can move quickly to establish the new project office and move forward on these very important seismic upgrades.”

Quick Facts:

- B.C. is recognized worldwide as a leading jurisdiction on seismic research and seismic safety with experts from around the world coming here to learn from our work.
- The primary objective of the Seismic Mitigation Program is to achieve a life-safety standard for schools by minimizing the probability of local structural collapse as a result of a seismic event.
- To date, the Vancouver board of education has completed 20 seismic upgrades worth approximately \$218 million. Among these 20 upgrades, one was a secondary school and eight were very small upgrades.
- The board has 69 high-risk schools operating today that need to be addressed in the future.
- Since 2001, the government’s award winning Seismic Mitigation Program has spent or committed \$2.2 billion to upgrade or replace 213 high-risk schools: 140 projects completed, eight under construction, 11 proceeding to construction and there are 54 projects the Province has already committed to fund that are in various stages of planning.
- It is estimated that it will cost a further \$600 million to complete upgrades or replacement of the remaining 104 high-risk schools in B.C.

Learn More:

The Memorandum of Understanding for the Vancouver Project office is available at:
http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/capitalplanning/seismic/vancouver_project_office_MOU.pdf

Information on the Seismic Mitigation Program can be found at:
<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/capitalplanning/seismic/welcome.htm>

A backgrounder is available at: <http://ow.ly/AvzTA>

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