



# MEDIA RELEASE

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### **State seismic commission releases report on centennial of San Francisco quake**

A report released this week by the Alaska Seismic Hazards Safety Commission stresses the need to take actions that will reduce casualties and economic losses during the state's next major earthquake. Published April 18, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great San Francisco earthquake, the report identifies important policy issues the Commission will address if its life is extended past June 30 by a bill currently in the legislature.

“The San Francisco earthquake was the birth of modern earthquake science,” said John Aho, a retired Anchorage consulting engineer and chair of the Commission. “Thanks to the major advances in our knowledge of earthquake processes and effects over the past 100 years, we now have the tools to save thousands of lives and significantly reduce earthquake losses.” The San Francisco earthquake and resulting fires killed more than 3,000 people and left tens of thousands of people homeless. Most of those losses were due to poor construction practices and virtually nonexistent response plans. “We have the knowledge to make our buildings and utilities much safer from earthquakes; we just have to put that knowledge into action,” Aho said.

The report identifies five policy issues for which the Commission proposes to develop recommendations for education, guidance, assistance, and implementation to reduce future earthquake losses. First among these is to assess the structural stability of critical facilities, with public schools being a particular concern. Other issues include earthquake insurance, approaches to future building construction, response and recovery practices to mitigate future seismic risk, and hazard identification and public education.

“From our understanding of the geology and seismology of Alaska, we know that major, potentially damaging earthquakes will continue to occur,” said Rod Combellick, a geologist with the Department of Natural Resources and a member of the Commission. “As the population increases and development expands, the risk of economic losses and casualties will continue to rise unless we take greater action to make our structures less vulnerable to earthquake damage,” he said.

### MORE ###

Alaska averages a magnitude 7 earthquake each year, and a magnitude 8 event about once every 14 years, according to Roger Hansen, state seismologist and commission member. The 1964 Alaska earthquake was magnitude 9.2, among the three Alaska quakes ranking among the world's ten strongest. Hansen and other scientists warn that it is only a matter of time before another large quake strikes beneath a population center or triggers another major tsunami.

While the commission is due to expire June 30, 2006, the Alaska Senate is considering legislation to extend it through June 2012 and expand its purview to include tsunami risks. House Bill 83 passed the Alaska House in 2005 and is now before the Senate Finance Committee.

Copies of the Commission's report may be obtained from the Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys at 3354 College Road, Fairbanks, Alaska, or from the Seismic Hazards Safety Commission's Web site:

[http://www.dggs.dnr.state.ak.us/seismic\\_hazards\\_safety\\_commission.htm](http://www.dggs.dnr.state.ak.us/seismic_hazards_safety_commission.htm)

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