ASHSC Policy Recommendation 2012-1

Development of a post-earthquake technical clearinghouse web site for Alaska

Post-earthquake technical clearinghouse web sites have become the standard platform to disseminate information, coordinate reconnaissance investigation activities, and archive perishable geologic and geotechnical data in the aftermath of a damaging earthquake. The Commission encourages the State to develop an Alaska-specific post-earthquake technical clearinghouse.

Potential development of a post-earthquake clearinghouse for Alaska
Position statement in support of ASHSC policy recommendation 2012-1

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July 5, 2012

In the aftermath of major damaging earthquakes worldwide, earthquake clearinghouse web sites have served as an effective mechanism to disseminate information, document and archive earthquake effects, and coordinate various response groups. The documentation of perishable geologic, geotechnical, and engineering data is a critical component of understanding the environmental and social effects of earthquakes. These data are important for guiding rebuilding efforts, assessing the need for follow-up research, and mitigating the effects of future earthquakes. Earthquake clearinghouse web sites provide a venue for post-earthquake reconnaissance teams to post their observations, as well as serve as a semi-permanent location to disseminate information, archive measurements, photographs, and maps, and host links to other resources. At present, the State of Alaska does not have a protocol for establishing an earthquake clearinghouse or a plan to coordinate a post-earthquake reconnaissance in the event of a major damaging earthquake.

Since the initiation of the National Science Foundation's Learning from Earthquakes Program in 1973, multidisciplinary teams of researchers have been deployed to the location of damaging earthquakes to investigate earthquake effects. In 2002, the National Earthquake Hazard Reduction Program (NEHRP) and the Western States Seismic Policy Council (WSSPC) recommended that states with earthquake hazards establish a plan for post-earthquake technical clearinghouses to be activated within 24 hours of a major event. Since that time, earthquake clearinghouse web sites have been set up by the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute (EERI) for the majority of damaging earthquakes over the last several years including the 2010 Haiti, 2010 Canterbury, New Zealand, 2011 Tohoku, Japan earthquakes among others. Other similar web sites have been created by the Geo-engineering Extreme Events Reconnaissance (GEER), Universities, and government agencies. Additionally, the Group on Earth Observations has launched Geohazard Supersites to monitor and study major disasters including earthquakes, providing a rapid means to access a wide variety of data.

In preparation for a major earthquake in California, a multi-agency consortium created the California Earthquake Clearinghouse in 2010 to provide a venue where engineers, geologists, seismologists, sociologists, economists, and other professionals who arrive in the affected area can join a larger, temporary organization (the Clearinghouse). The purpose of the organization is to facilitate the gathering of information, maximize its availability, and better use the talents of those present to improve the information available to officials managing response and recovery operations. The Western States Seismic Policy Council (WSSPC) Basin and Range committee designed a clearinghouse based on the California model to create a model plan applicable to all Basin and Range Province states. The state of Utah has implemented parts of this plan and has launched a geologic hazards technical clearinghouse specific to Utah.

The State of Alaska is the most seismically active state in the U.S. The state will suffer the effects of future large magnitude earthquakes. Thus, based on the overwhelming acceptance in the earthquake community of earthquake clearinghouse web sites as the state-of-the-art in earthquake investigations, the Alaska Seismic Hazards Safety Commission recommends that the State should develop an Alaska specific post-earthquake technical clearinghouse.