



MEDIA RELEASE

Ruapehu District Council

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COUNCIL MEETS WITH BUILDING OWNERS ON EARTHQUAKE PRONE BUILDING POLICY

Taumarunui building owners have met with Ruapehu District Council (RDC) elected members and key staff along with representatives from consultancy organisation AECOM to discuss council's planned upgrade on its earthquake prone building policy and how it will affect them.

RDC Chief Executive, David Hammond, said that the situation in Christchurch had 'sharpened everyone's focus' on the need to have a better understanding of the potential risks of a major earthquake event in the Ruapehu District.

"The massive devastation in Christchurch highlights that council's current Earthquake Prone, Dangerous and Insanitary Buildings Policy (the Policy) that currently allows timeframes of up to 25 years for buildings to be brought up to 'earthquake resistant' standard may no longer be responsible, nor publically tolerable, and as such in need of review," he said.

"Today people who enter a building or work in them want to know the building's standard."

"Because of the size of the project to undertake structural assessments of all Ruapehu buildings and the potential impact on Ruapehu's economy in bringing buildings up to standard council is taking a practical approach by having high use, and essential buildings checked first."

"Buildings in this category include; council, government, emergency services and frequented places of worship and public assembly."

Mr Hammond told the meeting that council was very conscious of the need to balance public safety against costs.

"Initial assessments are that there are around 600 buildings in Ruapehu that will eventually be affected which about 100 are council owned," he said.

"Council has a contract with AECOM to undertake building earthquake risk reports for a very reasonable rate and has negotiated to make this price available to Ruapehu building owners who want to take advantage of it," he said.

“Following the meeting a number of private building owners voluntarily signed-up to have structural assessments undertaken on their buildings under council’s AECOM contract.”

Mr Hammond said that this offer remains open to other Ruapehu building owners.

AECOM Associate Director - Buildings, Colin Jacobsen, told the meeting that commercial buildings designed after 1976 will probably comply with recent codes and most likely be safe in the event of an earthquake.

“Buildings designed and built after 1976 will not necessarily be earthquake prone but some might be an earthquake risk if they have critical structural weaknesses,” he said.

“Domestic residences are not covered in council policies but most are light timber frame buildings and would be reasonably safe except for issues with chimneys and brickwork which homeowners should check.”

RDC Team Leader Strategic Development, Pauline Love, told the meeting that council was establishing a register of buildings to assist manage enforcement of earthquake standards on buildings used by the public.

“In the long term council needs to be satisfied all earthquake prone buildings conform to a reasonable standard,” she said.

“Council will start the update of its five year old Policy later this year and will be seeking public feedback at that time.”

DAVID HAMMOND
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

CJH : PRW