

## **EARTHQUAKE SEMINAR 4 – QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

**Q:** What would be the most important thing in such seismic project work?

**A:** Nick Clendon (Coffey) replied that it would be to get the engineer and professionals involved early in order to provide the best design method and to lower cost. For example, there may be a detailed seismic strengthening option but different prices can be obtained for a variety of reasons such as equipment availability, profit margin. The body corporate will need to discuss with the engineer whether to involve the contractor early or go to tender stage.

**Q:** Dr Peter Johnstone asked whether we have a good enough understanding of risk and how can we demystify risk? He went on to state that the chance of being injured in an earthquake in Wellington is small and that huge sums are now required to be spent in strengthening buildings.

Geraldine Murphy (Inner City Association) noted that the reality is that there are already section 124 notices issued by the Wellington City Council and that the amendments to the Act are now law.

Someone else commented that market forces will prevail because people will not purchase units in a building that does not meet the standard.

Dr Johnstone said that the market may have it wrong because of incorrect understanding, and in some cases strengthening may not be required.

**Q:** What do you do when the project is going down the wrong path? Ideally, you would want to be able to have an information source on which path to follow.

**A:** Steve Cody (Wellington City Council) said that the challenge for the Council and others is that no one size fits all. The Council does not hold a lot of information – it processes consents. It can only give general advice.

Geraldine Murphy (Inner City Association) noted that the ICA had forward a proposal to fund an earthquake advisory officer to help people navigate their way through the Council process. The Council should help as the seismic strengthening was driven in large part by public good considerations. The model was already there in the weathertightness advisory service and the Council should do something in the absence of the government doing anything. Councillor Iona Pannett had presented the proposal for an advisory role in the last annual plan process but the officer in charge had put it on hold for a few months.

Ian Cassels said it would be helpful if the Council could advise on 5-6 cost-effective successful projects as case studies to help other understand how best to approach projects.

**Q:** A person involved with project management in Christchurch commented on Council requirements there to upgrade fire and other installations in the course of conducting earthquake repairs, and that some of these carry disproportionate costs relative to the cost of repair.

**A:** Steve Cody clarified that those are matters required under the Building Act and Councils are required to decide what is needed, including:

- means of access
- means of escape from fire.

Both of these need reports. There should, however, be a discussion between the Council and owner on what would be reasonably required given the repair cost.

**Q:** A suggestion was made to commission a report on providers.

**A:** Nick Clendon commented that some companies have particular strengths. Some companies are not good at everything.

It was suggested that the Inner City Association or the Body Corporate Chairs' Group could provide a vehicle or facilitate the collection of information about professionals, ie a channel to say what was done and what worked well, with rules around the process.

Ian Cassels said that this would reward competence. However, in order to know objectively whether something was done well standards would be required.

Wendy Booth said it was very expensive to keep on peer reviewing and that we are all challenged to find the best and most cost-effective advice.

**Q:** How usual is it to get two disparate seismic assessments, eg 35 and 75 per cent of code.

**A:** Ian Cassels commented that some engineers try to find weaknesses, other focus on strength.

ISPS provided an example where the assessment was incomplete and the engineer had to make consecutive assessments to investigate particular elements. Only some minor elements needed upgrading which was less than expected. This highlighted the need to make some investigations up front to properly inform the engineer. Engineers will always take a conservative approach if they have to make assumptions in lieu of facts.

**Q:** Where is all the money coming from for the seismic strengthening? Residential apartment owners average 60 years of age.

**A:** Geraldine Murphy (Inner City Association) commented that that was the elephant in the room. Some people will not be able to find money and referred to Ian Cassel's suggestion of cheaper Council loans. This is a matter that needs to be pushed back to central and local government as any support so far provided is only for heritage buildings and even that is miniscule. She encouraged seminar participants to lobby Grant Robertson (Wellington Central MP) and Paul Foster-Bell (List MP). Wellington was in a different situation to Auckland in having a much more compressed time frame (7 years for priority buildings; 15 years for others, compared with 50 years in low seismic risk areas). Options need to be investigated and some may involve legislation.