

## Building Codes – Seismic Concerns

**HB 1081** by Representative Ron Lollar  
House Business & Utilities Subcommittee

**SB 1149** by Senator Reginald Tate  
Senate Commerce Committee

### THE ISSUE

The State Fire Marshal adopted the 2006 International Building Code and 2009 International Residential Code as **minimum standards** for construction in Tennessee to protect the safety of its residents. The purpose of nationally recognized building codes is the protection of lives. National building codes are updated periodically as the direct result of information learned from structural collapses and other failures.

Although HB 1081/SB 1149 as introduced appears to be a caption bill, there is reason to believe that, because of action taken by the Memphis City Council and the Shelby County Commission, the intention is to reduce seismic requirements found in the adopted building codes.

Any discussion about cost effectiveness by developers or contractors does not stand up in the light of the technical work completed by the experts in the field of seismology. FEMA developed the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program to mitigate against large federal government costs from natural hazards in a post-earthquake response situation.

They learned that front-end design and construction would incrementally introduce cost that would pay large returns in post-earthquake response costs and **loss of life** estimates. They determined this front-end cost should be borne by the persons responsible for construction of the structure that would be the risk generator - the developer or owner of the building. During the original design and construction is the appropriate point to interject the cost, like an air-bag system or side-impact system on an automobile. Most people never use their impact systems on their cars, but we all pay for them when we buy a new car.

The cost increase incurred over the last 4 building code revisions, spanning 10 years, is 1% in the projects in high seismic regions. Though significant, it is much more cost effective than increasing taxes to cover potential recovery cost estimates, by letting the loss of life occur.

If the scientific and professional design communities of this nation support these codes, who are we to know what's overestimated. We have to trust the process and stay with the accepted standard in the industry. It is responsible public policy that we plan, over a long period of time, to replace the current inventory of dangerous, non-resilient buildings with safer, resilient buildings that will resist prescribed seismic ground motion and protect lives.

### KEY POINTS

- Building codes are **minimum** standards designed to save lives, not to protect property investments.
- Federal emergency funding is tied to conformance to preventive standards found in building codes. Tennessee could experience a reduction in disaster relief funding as a result of these changes to building standards.
- The State Architects' and Engineers' Board opposes reducing the requirements of adopted codes, in the interest of public safety.

### ACTION REQUESTED

- **oppose HB 1081/SB 1149 and all efforts to weaken codes requirements for design and construction**

2015