

SB 1953 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: What are the requirements of SB 1953?

A: SB 1953 established a schedule for California hospitals to meet seismic safety goals by classifying hospitals by level of danger of collapse, and instituting deadlines for retrofitting and/or reconstruction.

Q: What is an SPC-1 building?

A: According to the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD), Structural Performance Category-1 (SPC-1) buildings, “pose a significant risk of collapse and a danger to the public after a strong earthquake.” SPC-1 buildings must be retrofitted, replaced, or removed from acute care service by January 1, 2008.

Hospitals may request an extension to 2013. A further extension to 2015 is available under limited circumstances. All SPC-1 buildings must be completely replaced with new structures by 2030, even if they were seismically retrofitted to meet the 2008/2013 deadlines. To bring SPC-1 buildings into compliance, about 50 percent of current hospital floor space must be rebuilt.

Q: What is an SPC-2 building?

A: According to OSHPD, Structural Performance Category-2 (SPC-2) buildings “do not significantly jeopardize life, but may not be repairable or functional following strong ground motion.” SPC-2 buildings must be brought into compliance by January 1, 2030 or be removed from acute care service.

Q: Could these categories change?

A: Using a new type of seismic risk analysis software called HAZUS, some current SPC-1 buildings may be reclassified as SPC-2 buildings if they face a 10 percent or less chance of complete damage. They will not have to meet the 2008/2013 deadlines, but they will still have to meet the 2030 deadline.

In addition, if the analysis shows a 10 percent to 15 percent probability for complete damage, the building will be placed in a new SPC-1E category and the 2008/2013 deadline will be moved back to 2020. In all cases, the reclassified buildings must meet the 2030 deadline or be removed from acute care services. The HAZUS analyses, expected to be completed in early 2007, could result in reclassification of many SPC-1 buildings.

Q: Will SPC-1 buildings meet the legislative deadlines?

A: A study sponsored by the California HealthCare Foundation (CHCF) estimates that about half of SPC-1 buildings will not meet the 2008/2013 deadlines and many may not meet the final 2030 deadline.

Q: Why will so many hospitals not meet the legislative deadlines?

A: Many fewer hospitals than anticipated are doing retrofits because of the high cost and disruption to patient services. In addition, replacement costs are high because of the need to accommodate new technologies, public health requirements, aging hospital infrastructure, and inflation.

Q: What are the public policy implications of the slow pace of compliance?

A: The projected cost of rebuilding has already caused some hospitals to close or consolidate. The threat of closure for not meeting deadlines could result in possible barriers to services. On the other hand, failure to enforce deadlines could result in seismically unsafe facilities collapsing during a major earthquake. The CHCF study notes that policymakers may have to consider further amending the deadlines or public funding for hospitals that have not complied with the legislative requirements.