



CITY OF SANTA MONICA
PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT
BUILDING & SAFETY DIVISION

Residential Tenant's Guide to Seismic Retrofit

This guide is for tenants of residential buildings that have been identified by the City of Santa Monica as a Potentially Seismically Vulnerable Building and may require a Seismic Retrofit. This guide provides general information so tenants may be informed of the procedures and expectations during a Seismic Retrofit.

Do I live in a building that needs Seismic Retrofit?

The City of Santa Monica has identified buildings that will require structural analysis in order to determine if the building will require a full Seismic Retrofit. These buildings are classified as "Potentially Seismically Vulnerable" and are listed on the City's webpage by address and parcel number. The webpage can be accessed at: <https://www.smgov.net/seismic>

What is a Potentially Seismically Vulnerable Building (PSVB)?

There are five types of buildings within the City that are vulnerable to severe damage or collapse in a moderate or large-scale earthquake. Any building that falls under one of these five construction types must be retrofitted against a serious seismic event. If the City was unable to verify whether or not a seismic retrofit was completed on one of these buildings, it was placed on our list.

Is my building dangerous?

If a building requires Seismic Retrofit, it may be considered, to a degree, more vulnerable to seismic forces when compared to modern buildings that were built using the latest building codes and current application of earthquake science. Vulnerable buildings, as compared to their modern counterparts, have a greater potential for damage.

What is the City of Santa Monica Seismic Retrofit Program?

The Seismic Retrofit Program is allowing Santa Monica to be a safer city through the strengthening of older vulnerable buildings. Buildings that are structurally retrofitted perform better in an earthquake and have a better chance of surviving with minimal damage.

Owners of a building of the five major categories will receive an "Order to Structurally Analyze Potentially Seismically Vulnerable Building". These owners will be required to structurally analyze their building for seismic resistance by the standards in the Santa Monica Municipal Code (SMMC). Owners must also follow a specified compliance time frame. The time frame can be found on the City's Retrofit webpage <https://www.smgov.net/seismic>.

How will residential tenants know if the structural analysis results in a Seismic Retrofit?

If the City of Santa Monica determines from the structural report that the building must be Seismically Retrofitted, then the building owner is required to provide each tenant with a "Tenant and Occupant Advisory" stating that the building will undertake a Seismic Retrofit as part of the standard construction permitting process for completing the work.

How will the Seismic Retrofit Program affect residential tenants?

Effects from Seismic Retrofit can be minimal-to-significant, depending on the deficiency of the building, structural design solution, access to key building elements, and method of retrofit work. Retrofit work may vary from a few months to one-year or more. Construction work may require temporary relocation of a tenant and may result in incremental rent costs.

The large majority of PSVB cases are "Soft Story" buildings: multi-family residential buildings with "tuck-under" parking. In most cases, retrofitting these building should have minimal to no effect on tenant units, will only effect parking areas, and the work in many cases can be completed within a few months. Other building types require more extensive retrofitting that may be more invasive and lengthy. Again, retrofits are unique to each building, so construction effects and timelines will vary for the reasons stated above.

Will tenants in rent controlled buildings be affected by the cost of Seismic Retrofit?

Increases in rent for controlled properties are under the purview of the Rent Control Board. The Board will determine if owners may “pass-through” costs from Seismic Retrofit onto tenants. The Board may consider factors such as maximum percentage that may be passed-through, maximum increase per month, maximum period of pass-through.

Will Seismic Retrofit cause a continual disturbance in my building?

Seismic Retrofit will result in occasional disturbances depending on the degree of construction. Pursuant to the Santa Monica Municipal Code, construction work can only occur between specified hours: 8:00AM to 6:00PM Monday through Friday, 9:00AM to 5:00PM Saturday. No work is allowed on Sunday and major holidays. Work of excessive noise such as jackhammering can only be performed from 10:00AM to 3:00PM.

What protections do tenants have against effects from hazardous substances found in older buildings?

Older buildings may have hazardous materials inherent in period construction materials. This can include asbestos and lead. A building owner must hire a certified professional specializing in hazardous material assessment for the abatement and removal of such substances. The Santa Monica Municipal Code requires that proof of proper handling of hazardous materials be provided to the City.

Will Seismic Retrofit work require me to relocate from my building?

It depends. If your unit becomes inaccessible or uninhabitable during a period of Seismic Retrofit work, then temporary relocation will become necessary. If retrofit work is to the point of endangering health and safety of the residents, then relocation is in order.

How long will I be relocated?

The extent of relocation will depend on the work that affects your unit or habitation in the building. The building owner must provide the City of Santa Monica with an estimated timeframe for which relocation is necessary. The Building Officer must approve the estimate and the owner is expected to remain within this timeframe. If an extension of time is required, the owner must request an extension with assurances that the tenant is completely informed of the extension.

If I am relocated, I am afraid that I will not be able to return to my unit.

Per Santa Monica Municipal Code Section 4.36.100(f), displaced tenant(s) have the right to reoccupy his or her unit upon the completion of the work necessary for the unit to comply with housing, health, building or safety laws, any governmental order, or the unit is otherwise restored to a habitable condition. The tenant retains all rights of tenancy that existed prior to the displacement.

For additional information related to the City of Santa Monica Seismic Retrofit Program, visit the City’s webpage at: <https://www.smgov.net/seismic>