



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS ASSOCIATIONS

JANUARY 18, 2010 - The National Council of Structural Engineers Associations (NCSEA) expresses its deep sorrow for the devastating losses suffered by the people of Haiti in the January 12th earthquake that struck Port-Au-Prince and the surrounding areas. It is our fervent hope that assistance of the United States and other countries around the world helps to alleviate the suffering to the greatest extent possible.

The Structural Engineering profession is committed to protecting the public safety; and a number of Structural Engineers are already participating in the rescue efforts in Haiti as members of search and rescue teams. The expertise of our members is vital to ensure the safe removal of debris and the design of temporary support shoring needed to extricate victims trapped in the rubble of collapsed structures.

NCSEA maintains a Structural Engineers Emergency Response (SEER) committee that consists of volunteer structural engineers across the country, trained in the structural engineering aspects of emergency response to earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural or man-made disasters. The SEER Committee is currently communicating with the government and private sector to identify ways in which the structural engineering community can lend its talents, skills and experience. At the present time, however, public and private sector personnel are reminded that they should not self-deploy to affected areas. The United States Department of State is coordinating foreign disaster assistance, and U.S. assets should deploy only if tasked to do so by the State Department. The most urgent need at the present time is supporting ongoing disaster relief fundraising efforts. When requests for technical support are received through the proper authorities, NCSEA will look to its Member Organizations to provide trained volunteers.

The Haiti earthquake, as well as earthquakes in Turkey, India and China in the last decade, demonstrate the critical importance of designing structures in seismically vulnerable regions to meet the requirements of modern seismic codes, like the ones used by Structural Engineers in the United States for almost forty years. In addition to proper design, the process of construction and inspection must strictly enforce the design intent to ensure that the structures will protect the safety of the occupants in the event of a major earthquake. In the United States, even higher standards are set in our codes for critical buildings, such as hospitals, police and fire stations, and other structures needed for immediate post-earthquake response.

Vulnerable structures still exist in the U.S., similar to those that collapsed in Haiti. These structures are unreinforced masonry and non-ductile concrete frame buildings built before the mid-1970's. Structural Engineers now have the tools, however, to evaluate and design retrofit schemes that can make these vulnerable structures safe from collapse. Some government agencies, major corporations and other building owners have taken steps to mitigate the hazard posed by vulnerable existing buildings; but more needs to be done if major cities and small towns in seismically vulnerable areas of the United States are going to be resilient enough to avoid the types of devastation suffered in Haiti and other countries when a violent earthquake strikes.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS ASSOCIATIONS

NCSEA serves to advance the practice of structural engineering and, as the national voice for practicing structural engineers, protect the public's right to safe, sustainable and cost effective buildings, bridges and other structures. Visit our website for more information at www.ncsea.com. For more details regarding this press release, please contact Jeanne Vogelzang, Executive Director, NCSEA: 312-649-4600 ext. 201.

OTHER HELPFUL INFORMATION ON EARTHQUAKE RESILIENCY AND STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING CAN BE FOUND AT THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES:

http://www.spur.org/publications/library/report/theresilientcity_part1_020109 AND
<http://www.celebratingeqsafety.com/>