

Seismic Strengthening Q&A

1. What are the benefits of strengthening my home?

When an earthquake occurs, your home will have a better chance of surviving and may only sustain minimal damage. Also, retrofitting may lower your earthquake insurance premiums and deductible. In some cases, insurance companies will not insure a home that is not strengthened. Increasing your home's earthquake fitness enhances its value and improves its salability.

2. Is a Building Permit required?

Yes. The San Leandro Building Regulations Division has made the permit process a one-stop, over-the-counter transaction. We are available to assist you while you prepare your plans and we provide ongoing classes on how to perform the work.

3. Is it important that I obtain a Building Permit?

Absolutely. Insurance companies, universities, local building departments, the engineering community, and the media all recognize that the Bay Area has entered a period of increased seismic risk and that proper strengthening can prevent earthquake damage to homes. A Building Permit protects you via the inspection process and provides a record that the work was done in accordance with accepted standards.

4. How much does seismic strengthening cost?

Studies have shown that the typical costs of home strengthening range from a few hundred dollars to around three thousand dollars. You can save money by doing some or all of the work yourself.

5. If I strengthen my home, will my property taxes be increased?

Not at all. This type of work is specifically exempt from tax re-assessment. For more information, contact the Alameda County Office of the Assessor at (510) 272-3787.

6. Do I have to hire a Contractor?

All of the work prescribed on our permit-ready plan set can be performed by a homeowner with basic carpentry skills. If you want to hire a contractor, use the permit-ready plan set to help shop for bids. You will save time and money because each contractor is bidding on the same scope of work.

7. Do I have to hire an Architect or Engineer?

No. Our permit-ready plan set is so simple to prepare that it can be easily completed in an evening or on a weekend. If you have questions preparing the plan, let the San Leandro Building Regulations Division help you. An Engineer or an Architect may be required if you have special conditions such as a brick foundation, poor quality concrete, or unusual structural conditions in your home.

8. How do I find a Contractor?

The best way to find a contractor is through personal references, or through some of the agencies listed in this handbook. In any case, ask the contractor that you choose to provide at least three references.

9. Can the City recommend contractors?

No. However, the San Leandro Building Regulations Division maintains a file on contractors who have participated in our contractor's course for seismic strengthening. The file contains specific information about the contractor. Some of the items included in the file are license status, actions against the licensee, their insurance policy information, and a list of properties in San Leandro where the contractor has performed seismic strengthening work.

10. What tools do I need?

The most common tools used in retrofit work are a circular saw, electric drill and drill bits, rotary hammer drill, torque wrench, hole saw, pneumatic nail gun, palm nailer, and typical small carpentry tools.

11. Where can I get these tools?

Through the San Leandro Tool Lending Library! Many of the tools (with the exception of circular saws) are available, free of charge to residents who have completed the City's Home Earthquake Strengthening Program. At the San Leandro Permit Center, the Counter Technicians can assist you in checking out the tools.