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Victoria touts seismic upgrades for heritage homes

San Francisco-based earthquake damage expert presents report at city hall

DANIEL PALMER / Sep. 18, 2012 7:00 p.m. / NEWS



This heritage home in California dropped by half a storey in an earthquake

Many heritage homes across Victoria may be ill-equipped to withstand even a moderate earthquake, according to a U.S. expert.

Howard Cook, a San Francisco-Based contractor and former damage inspector for the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, presented his seismic upgrading recommendations to about 100 contractors and other participants last week at city hall.

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“The housing stock and type that we have here in Victoria ... is very similar to a lot of the housing stock in San Francisco,” said Steve Barber, Victoria’s senior heritage planner.

“Because they’ve had a lot more direct experience with earthquakes in California, there’s quite a bit more experience in terms of what kinds of damage can occur.”

Victoria’s heritage register currently includes 620 homes, the majority of which require seismic upgrading.

The most vulnerable homes are those built with “cripple walls,” the short walls between the foundation and main floor of many older houses, Barber said.

This particularly weak point can be upgraded at a relatively less expensive cost than what would be required after an earthquake.

The Victoria Heritage Foundation offers grants to cover up to 30 per cent of the cost (to a maximum of \$20,000) for seismic upgrades and other structural improvement work on designated heritage homes.

But the foundation is considering an increase to that amount for seismic-specific upgrades in 2013, said Brigitte Clark, executive director.

Cook’s presentation cited a study of two similar Victorian-style homes in San Francisco that were damaged during a 6.9-magnitude earthquake.

“One was retrofitted before the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake – it needed \$5,000 in repairs. The other house cost \$250,000 to repair,” the report stated.

Barber recommends all homeowners in Victoria assess their seismic

preparedness.

“There is such a greater awareness of what earthquake hazards are (in California) than there is here,” he said.

For more information on heritage grants and eligibility, visit victoriaheritagefoundation.ca.

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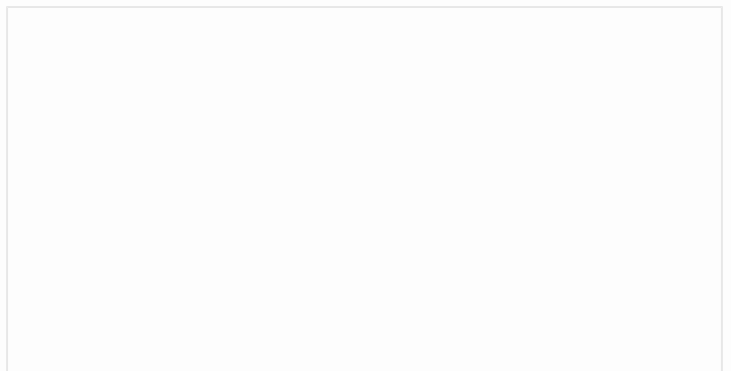
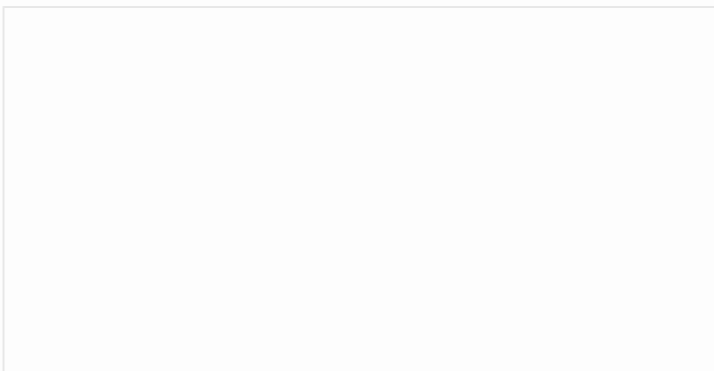
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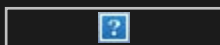
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