THE CALIFORNIA SEISMIC SAFETY COMMISSION, 1975-80:

PUBLIC POLICY AND A PRACTITIONER'S OBSERVATIONS

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Introduction

A recent article in a national scientific journal stated that, "The establishment of this commission is the greatest public accomplishment on earthquake hazard mitigation in California since the great study of the 1906 earthquake by the State Earthquake Investigation Commission, set up specially for this purpose." [Bolt, 1978]

After a four year (1970-74) study of the earthquake hazard in California by the Legislature, the Seismic Safety Commission was created as an independent agency in 1974. It was made independent because of the need to evaluate existing programs; provide coordination of twenty State agencies operating nearly fifty earthquake safety programs plus those of local government and related efforts of national agencies; and find practical solutions to unanswered problems of hazard reduction and seek their implementation. The Commission's primary role, therefore, is the development and implementation of public policy.

Responsibilities and Objectives of the Commission

Because of the complex nature of earthquake hazard policy, the enabling legislation is very broad. The Commission's responsibilities include:
- Advising the Governor and Legislature on earthquake programs;
- Reviewing earthquake-related programs financed by the State and recommending improvements;
- Setting goals and priorities for reducing the earthquake hazard in the public and private sectors;
- Providing a consistent policy for earthquake-related programs for agencies at all government levels;
- Proposing needed legislation and reviewing other earthquake-related legislation;
- Conducting public hearings on earthquake safety issues;
- Helping to coordinate the earthquake safety activities of government at all levels;
- Recommending program changes for earthquake safety to State and local agencies and the private sector;
- Requesting State agencies to devise criteria to promote earthquake safety;