



# EARTHQUAKE ENGINEERING RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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## Earthquakeretrofit.org shows progress since Loma Prieta -- and the work we still have to do

In twenty years since the Loma Prieta earthquake, how has the Bay Area improved its seismic readiness?

A new website, [www.earthquakeretrofit.org](http://www.earthquakeretrofit.org), helps answer that question with a map of retrofitted buildings from Sacramento to Santa Cruz. The site allows anyone to post information and photos on an interactive map. The results, say the site's developers, show two decades of progress, one building at a time.

"So often, all we hear about earthquakes is how bad they're going to be. It's also important to recognize how much work has been done to reduce the risk," says Marjorie Greene, Special Projects Manager for the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, the Oakland-based nonprofit that hosts the new website.

Several thousand retrofits have been completed since Loma Prieta, but they've never been catalogued together, says David Bonowitz, a San Francisco structural engineer who helped conceive the website. He says those retrofits could translate into hundreds of lives and billions of dollars in repair and recovery costs that will now be saved.

"We thought it might be interesting to map the projects we knew about," says Bonowitz, "but it's even better to let owners and engineers show their own work, and to see small projects too, not just City Hall or the Bay Bridge." A week after a quiet launch and nothing but word of mouth publicity among earthquake professionals, the site had over a hundred projects posted, including high-rises and houses, Sutro Tower and one-story bungalows.

"We just need to get the word out," says Bonowitz. The organizers hope a diverse group, including homeowners, realtors, builders, and even cities will use the site to promote their own work and to learn from what others have done. As more projects are added, the website might reveal patterns or prompt visitors to ask questions:

-- What is my city doing to promote retrofit? Is it leading the way, or lagging?

-- Are there retrofits similar to my house, office, or school? What's happening in my neighborhood?

-- What kinds of buildings are under-represented? Where do we need better retrofit incentives?

The City of Oakland has embraced the grass roots website and is preparing to map 369 retrofits from its New Homeowner Program, which reimbursed new homeowners up to \$5,000 if they met the City's standards for seismic retrofits.

"The interactive map is a strong visual tool to promote retrofitting. In the next major earthquake, Oakland could lose one third of its housing and many lives! We take this seriously, which is why we have several programs to help Oakland residents retrofit their homes," says Oakland City Council Member Jean Quan. Like the famously successful "cash for clunkers", the New Homeowner Program has exhausted its initial funds, but Quan says the city will apply for new funding sources to support critical retrofits.

So far, most of the projects have been posted by engineers, and their descriptions run to the technical details. But several are from homeowners, who focus on cost and peace of mind:

-- "I was motivated to retrofit my house when I first bought it due to Berkeley's incentive program," wrote Erika Weisinger of her Ninth Street home, one of the mapped projects.

-- "The earthquake retrofit work cost much less than the termite and dry rot repair," wrote a site user from Albany.

-- "Total cost: Less than \$3000, one year's insurance premium," wrote a user from Palo Alto.

"We definitely hope to learn something from the site," says Bonowitz, "but in the end it's not a research project. It's about creating a sense of community and shared purpose. This work is spread over the whole region and over twenty years, but it adds up to something worth documenting in a public way."

With a zoomable Google-based map and a searchable gallery, [www.earthquakeretrofit.org](http://www.earthquakeretrofit.org) is free, non-commercial, and open to the public. It takes about a minute to add a new project to the map.

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