

Earthquake-prone Buildings: A Reset of the Rules

What property owners need to know about the Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Bill.

Overview

The Government has introduced the Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Bill (**Bill**), which proposes a fundamental shift in how earthquake risk in existing buildings is regulated in New Zealand. The stated aim of the Bill is to create a more proportionate, risk-based system focused on life-safety outcomes rather than compliance for its own sake.

A move away from %NBS

The Bill proposes removing the New Building Standard (%NBS) framework entirely and replacing it with tiered mitigation requirements based on the risk profile of individual buildings. Regulation would apply only to high-risk building types located in medium and high seismic zones. Buildings outside those parameters would no longer be able to be designated earthquake-prone.

What changes nationally

Buildings in low seismic zones - including Auckland, Northland and the Chatham Islands - would be removed from the earthquake-prone building system unless they are of a specified high-risk type.

At the same time, Coastal Otago (including Dunedin) and part of Stewart Island would shift from low to medium seismic risk, reflecting improved understanding of seismic hazards in those areas. As a result, some South Island property owners may newly fall within the scope of the regime.

Targeted mitigation rather than blanket strengthening

Instead of mandatory strengthening in all cases, the Bill introduces tiered mitigation requirements. Depending on the assessed risk, a building may require no work,

façade securing, a targeted retrofit, or - in limited cases - full seismic strengthening.

Many buildings that would require upgrades under the current legislation are expected to face lower-cost interventions, or no intervention at all.

Reducing barriers to seismic work

Where a building consent relates solely to seismic work, owners would no longer be required to upgrade fire safety and accessibility provisions as part of that work alone. Changes of use would similarly need only to meet the applicable seismic mitigation requirement.

These changes will be welcomed by landowners, as the additional work and costs triggered by such upgrades can be a significant deterrent to undertaking seismic improvements.

More time to complete work

Territorial authorities would be able to grant extensions of time to complete required seismic work, recognising affordability challenges and construction-sector capacity constraints. The definition of a "priority building" would also be narrowed to focus on those presenting the highest public-safety risk.

When does the Bill take effect?

The Bill was introduced in December 2025 and has passed its first reading. It is currently before the Transport and Infrastructure Select Committee, with public submissions having closed in February 2026. Submissions have been made by a wide range of property-sector participants, including Property Council New Zealand.

The Bill is not yet law and will take effect only once enacted. No commencement date has been confirmed, but an update from the Select Committee is expected in the coming months.

Want to know more?

If you have any questions, please contact our specialist [Property Team](#).