



PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS



IN CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
April 13, 2011

CONTACT:
Lisa Marie Burcar
Ryan Endean
916-446-0400

LEGISLATION NEEDED TO REQUIRE INDEPENDENT CONSTRUCTION INSPECTION --UNSAFE SCHOOLS POSE DANGER TO CHILDREN--

SACRAMENTO – To ensure the safety of all school children, the Professional Engineers in California Government (PECG) calls on the State Legislature to immediately take action to pass legislation requiring that the Division of the State Architect (DSA) inspect all school construction and is staffed with independent, qualified state inspectors to perform that function under the Field Act.

An in-depth report by *California Watch*, built on months of research and thousands of documents, reveals the current danger to our school children. It uncovers construction safety defects, missing or unqualified inspectors, inadequate testing of materials, dangerous construction flaws, local political pressure to overlook defective work, and understaffing of the Division of the State Architect (DSA).

According to *California Watch*, school districts hire private contractors to inspect construction work done by other private contractors. The school districts sometimes pressure inspectors to overlook deficiencies in order to save money. Under the Field Act, DSA is responsible for ensuring compliance with seismic safety building requirements. However, Governor Pete Wilson reduced the DSA staff by more than 50% despite an unprecedented increase in school construction. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger “borrowed” tens of millions of DSA dollars which were never repaid. Incredibly, according to *California Watch*, DSA currently has only 25 field engineers to oversee 3,100 projects under construction!

“PECG calls on the Legislature to immediately approve legislation to ensure that DSA will be directly responsible for onsite inspection of school building construction and will be adequately staffed with qualified engineers to perform that function,” said Matt Hanson, PECG President.

“The safety of school children is a statewide concern. We can no longer allow local politics to override government’s responsibility to ensure that schools are safe and childrens’ lives are protected during an earthquake. This means state inspectors, not private contractors selected by local politicians, must be onsite during school construction, with the authority to reject deficient

HEADQUARTERS: 455 Capitol Mall, Suite 501, Sacramento, CA 95814 • (916) 446-0400
LOS ANGELES: 130 N. Brand Boulevard, Suite 301, Glendale, CA 91203 • (818) 500-9941
SAN FRANCISCO: 1 Sutter Street, Suite 800, San Francisco, CA 94104 • (415) 861-5720
TELEFAX: Headquarters (916) 446-0489; Los Angeles (818) 247-2348; San Francisco (415) 861-5360

work. That is the only way to ensure our children are safe and taxpayers get the quality construction that they are paying for.”

The 1933 Long Beach earthquake destroyed or damaged hundreds of school buildings and would have caused the deaths of thousands of children if it had occurred during school hours. A month later, the Field Act became law. Essentially, it requires the Division of State Architect to ensure that school buildings are designed and constructed in a manner that will withstand earthquakes. Since that time, no California school child has been killed during an earthquake.

“*California Watch* has publicized how politics and penny pinching has put our public school children in jeopardy” said Hanson. “Now that the problem has been identified, there is no excuse for continuing to allow local politics to endanger school children throughout California. The Legislature should act immediately, as it did in 1933 in approving the Field Act. The health and safety of our children, teachers, and school employees need to be protected now, not after the next earthquake.”

PECG represents the senior structural engineers and architects at DSA responsible for protecting school children under the Field Act. For many years, PECG has highlighted the deficiency of inspections performed by private inspectors, some of whom are more concerned with pleasing the school district employer than guaranteeing school safety. In 2008, PECG sponsored Legislation (AB 2995) to move inspection hiring authority for school inspectors to the state. The bill was opposed by school districts and private inspectors and did not pass.

ABOUT PECG

PECG represents 13,000 state-employed engineers and related professionals responsible for designing and inspecting California’s highways and bridges, ensuring that schools and hospitals are safe during earthquakes, and protecting our air, water and beaches from polluters.