



DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING INSPECTION
City & County of San Francisco
1660 Mission Street, San Francisco, California 94103-2414

**SOFT STORY WOOD FRAME BUILDING
VOLUNTARY SEISMIC RETROFITTING
ORDINANCE NO.54-10
Effective April 19, 2010**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is this Ordinance about?

This ordinance provides incentives to upgrade soft story buildings through plan review fee waivers and permit processing expediting, while long-range strategies to address the vulnerabilities of soft-story buildings are developed for future implementation.

2. What is a soft-story wood-frame building?

A soft-story, wood-frame building is a structure where the first story is substantially weaker and more flexible than the stories above due to lack of walls or frames at the first floor (story). Typically, these buildings have parking or open commercial space such as restaurants or grocery stores on the first floor. This could make the first story ‘soft’ and likely to lean or collapse in earthquakes. As a consequence, such buildings may be highly vulnerable during earthquake events.

3. How can I tell if my building is a soft-story building? Will the Department of Building Inspection (DBI) perform a field inspection to determine whether or not my building is a “soft-story”?

For the purpose of qualifying for the incentives provided by this ordinance, a wood-frame building can be determined to be a soft-story building if it meets one the following three criteria:

- (i) A. Type V (wood-frame) building as defined in the San Francisco Building Code, and
- B. was constructed prior to May 21, 1973, and
- C. has a ground floor (1st story) level in which at least 50% of the floor area of the ground floor is used for Occupancy Classifications A (assembly), B (business), M (mercantile), S (storage, open or enclosed parking garages), or U (private garages);

or

- (ii) the building has been determined to have either a Weak Story or Soft Story deficiency when evaluated using the ASCE 31 Tier 2 procedure;

or

- (iii) the building has been determined to have a soft-story deficiency based on engineering analysis in an engineer's or architect's report that confirms the building having such soft-story and its potential vulnerability to possible collapse in a major earthquake and such report is acceptable by this department.

DBI is not able to provide field inspection service to determine whether or not a building is a "soft-story" building under such ordinance. An owner may hire a licensed civil or structural engineer, or architect, to determine if the building meets the definition of a soft-story according to Administrative Bulletin AB-094.

- 4. What are the benefits of performing a voluntarily seismic upgrade under this ordinance?

With the new voluntary seismic upgrade ordinance, any application submitted for such work to DBI after April 19, 2010 is eligible for a **waiver of the "plan review" portion of the building permit fees**, as well as expedited processing --meaning that we will get you through the review and approval process quickly! In addition, if you act voluntarily and ahead of the Mayor's current plan to require soft-story retrofit, any building upgraded under the voluntary standards will be exempt for 15 years from possibly more stringent building performance standards that may be part of any mandatory ordinance.

- 5. How to apply for a building permit under this ordinance to take advantage of the incentives?

File a permit application for alteration noting the scope of work as **"Voluntary seismic upgrade of soft-story per ordinance NO.54-10 and Administrative Bulletin AB-094.** Portions of work that are not part of the soft-story upgrade work, such as access compliance or other alterations, must be submitted under a separate permit application. The permit application must include the normally required two sets of plans and calculations.

- 6. How much money would I be able to save under this ordinance?

The amount of plan review fees that can be saved depends on the cost of construction and whether review is also required by other departments such as Department of City Planning, Fire Department, and the Department of Public Works.

As an example, waiving the plan review fee portion by the Department of Building Inspection alone for a retrofitting project for a one or two-unit residential building with a construction cost of \$10,000 will save about **\$355**; and the same building with a construction cost of \$50,000 will save about **\$1,120**.

In another example, the saving from the **plan review fee portions** by the Department of Building Inspection and the Fire Department, for a construction cost of \$50,000 in a residential building with 3 or more units with a restaurant on the ground floor, will amount to about **\$1,732**.

7. Would I benefit under this ordinance by just adding sill plate anchor bolts to the foundation and installing plywood panels on open wood wall studs in the existing garage in my building?

While we encourage building owners to perform this easy and simple work to improve the seismic performance of wood-frame buildings, this work does not meet the specified soft-story retrofit standards. Only if the design is in compliance with one of the acceptable retrofit standards listed in Administrative Bulletin AB-094 will a project qualify for the incentives under this ordinance.

8. How much will it cost to seismically strengthen my soft-story building?

The cost will vary widely depending upon the level of the hazard and needed seismic upgrade work. Building owner will have to consult a licensed civil or structural engineer, or architect, who specializes in seismic strengthening of buildings to develop a retrofit plan, and bids may be obtained from licensed contractors.

9. How much time do I have to apply for the permit before this opportunity ends?

The incentives offered under this ordinance will be available until changed by legislative action.

10. Where can I find additional detail information?

Additional detailed information regarding this program can be found in Department of Building Inspection web site: www.sfdbi.org Click on **New Legislation on Soft-Story Wood-Frame Buildings** under the Highlights Section, from there links to following documents are available:

- Ordinance No.54-10 effective April 19, 2010;
- Administrative Bulletin AB-094; and,
- CAPSS Soft Story Report, are posted among others information.

And, additional questions may be answered by calling the DBI Code Question Hot Line at 415-558-6205.