

DEFINITIONS

Soft Story (Weak Story) Building

Buildings with weak first story walls, which have been weakened by large numbers of openings such as garages or storefront windows.

Underfloor Area

This term is used to describe floor areas below grade that are utilized, excluding vent shafts. This may include basements, crawl spaces, cellars, and storage. As long as this space provides some function to the building or is habitable, then it is considered an underfloor area.

Basement

The California Building Code defines a basement as “a *story* that is not a *story above grade plane*”.

Story Above Grade Plane

Any story having its finished floor surface entirely above grade plane, or in which the finished surface of the floor next above is:

1. More than 6 feet above grade plane; or
2. More than 12 feet above the finished ground level at any point.

To submit completed forms or receive additional information, please contact:

Department of Building Inspection

1660 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

Contacts for Information:

- Help Desk/ Information Counter
- Soft Story Program

Phone:
415-558-6699

Email:
softstory@sfgov.org

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www.sfdbi.org

To find out more about the San Francisco Soft Story Program, go to our website and select the “Earthquake Preparedness” option under the “Most Requested” tab.



San Francisco

Soft Story

Program 2013

Stronger Seismic Safety
to Protect the Public and
San Francisco's Future



SFDBI.org

The Soft Story Retrofit Program is vital to public safety and a sound investment in San Francisco's future.

Introduction

San Francisco adopted unanimously a new ordinance, No. 66-13, signed by Mayor Ed Lee on April 18th, 2013, and which established a Mandatory Soft Story Retrofit Program. The Department of Building Inspection (DBI) is responsible for implementing these new ordinance and compliance timelines.

This new ordinance was adopted to guide property owners on seismic strengthening in order to better protect highly vulnerable buildings from collapse during the next major earthquake. Extensive research has found that buildings in the 'soft-story' category are highly susceptible to major structural damage – making the seismic strengthening of such buildings a civic priority to protect those living or doing business in such buildings.

The Association of Bay Area Governments estimates that soft-story residential buildings will be responsible for 66 percent of the uninhabitable housing following a seismic event on the Hayward fault.

A City-Wide Problem

The ordinance applies to wood-frame buildings of three or more stories or two stories over a basement or underfloor area that have any portion extending above grade, and containing five or more residential dwelling units where the permit to construct was applied for prior to January 1, 1978, and where the building has not yet been seismically strengthened.

While these types of buildings and their associated risks are found in every neighborhood in San Francisco, they are most commonly found in the following districts: Mission, Western Addition, Richmond, North Beach, Marina District.

Building Owners' Responsibility

In September, 2013, the Department of Building Inspection will begin sending notices to building owners who will be required to complete and submit a mandatory screening form, per San Francisco Building Code Chapter 34B.

The building owner must have a California-licensed architect, or civil or structural engineer complete, and return to DBI within one year, the mandatory screening form that will be part of the notification package, providing the following information (Please note there is no fee for submitting the screening form.):

- All information and building characteristics required by DBI to determine if the building requires a retrofit;
- For buildings that have done previous retrofitting per SFBC Section 3402B Exception 1 or if the building does not have a soft story condition, an optional evaluation form may be submitted. This is a more detailed evaluation which is not required but can be completed and submitted to the Department with the required plan review fee.
- A declaration of the appropriate Compliance Tier

Exceptions

1. A building that has been seismically strengthened to meet or exceed the standards of Section 1604.11 of the San Francisco Building Code or its predecessor provisions within 15 years prior to the operative date of Chapter 34B of the San Francisco Building Code is exempt if work is shown to be properly permitted and completed.
2. A building that has completed voluntary seismic strengthening under the provisions of Administrative Bulletin AB-094. (The building owner can complete the screening form for ONLY this instance.)

Scope of Work

Construction is limited to the ground floor where large openings such as garages or commercial storefronts take away the shear walls of the building.

Compliance Tiers

- Tier I. Buildings that contain a Group A, E, R-2.1, R-3.1 or R-4 occupancy on any story
- Tier II. Buildings containing 15 or more dwelling units, except for buildings assigned to Tier I or Tier IV
- Tier III. Building not falling within the definition of another tier.
- Tier IV. Buildings that contain a Group B or M occupancy on the first story or in a basement or underfloor area that has any portion extending above grade, and buildings that are in mapped liquefaction zones, except for buildings assigned to Tier 1.

Compliance Tier	Submission of Screening Form and Optional Evaluation Form	Submittal of Permit Application with Plans for Seismic Retrofit Work	Completion of Work and Issuance of Certificate of Completion and Occupancy
I	1 Year	2 Years	4 Years
II	1 Year	3 Years	5 Years
III	1 Year	4 Years	6 Years
IV	1 Year	5 Years	7 Years