

ADVERTISEMENT

[View Weekly Flyers Online](#)

[flyercity.ca](http://flyercity.ca)

Save up to 50% on local retailers. Find the best sales this week.



# THE VANCOUVER SUN<sup>mobile</sup>

[HOME](#) | [NEWS](#) | [VANCOUVER & B.C.](#) | [STORY](#)

## B.C.'s auditor general warns province isn't adequately prepared for major quake

Tuesday, March 25, 2014

By The Canadian Press



B.C.'s auditor general says the provincial government isn't prepared for a catastrophic earthquake. In a report released today, auditor Russ Jones says Emergency Management BC has not made earthquake planning a priority. An Insurance Bureau of Canada risk assessment map shows the possible effect if an earthquake were to strike in B.C.'s Cascadia subduction zone, also called the "ring of fire" and located just off the regional coastline.

### Photographed by:

Insurance Bureau of Canada, Handout

VICTORIA - British Columbia's auditor general has for the second time in 17 years criticized the provincial government for not being prepared for a catastrophic earthquake that could claim lives and cost billions of dollars in damage.

The majority of residents in Canada's Pacific province may reside in an earthquake hazard area, and the region may be home to or adjacent to thousands of smaller earthquakes annually, but auditor general Russ Jones said in a report released Tuesday that B.C. has not made it a priority to prepare for the Big One.

Emergency Management BC — the Ministry of Justice agency responsible for earthquake preparedness — also came under fire for not disclosing to the public its own lack of preparedness.

As a result, Jones made nine recommendations, addressing issues such as long-term planning and annual public reporting.

"Given the province's current level of preparedness, a sustained commitment by all stakeholders is needed if we are going to minimize the loss of life and other devastating impacts expected from a catastrophic earthquake," said Jones.

In fact, a recent Insurance Bureau of Canada report that was cited by Jones estimated a catastrophic earthquake and tsunami off the province's south coast could result in damages totalling \$75 billion.

Attorney General and Minister of Justice Suzanne Anton said Jones's findings weren't a surprise because emergency-management officials worked with him while the report was prepared.

"It's a tough report, but a tough report does present an excellent opportunity to me and to government to make sure we move forward on his recommendations," she said.

Still, Anton took issue with one reporter who questioned why the government wasn't making the issue a priority.

"I actually disagree with your proposition," she said. "It is always a priority for Emergency Management BC. That's their job and that's what they do, and they do it well but are they doing enough? The auditor general says no, and I accept that."

The government has done a "massive amount of work" on earthquake preparedness, said Anton, noting it has also finished or is completing seismic upgrades to 214 schools and has even changed provincial building codes.

What the provincial government needs to do now is work on what she said is the "big picture," or in other words planning issues.

She said her ministry has hired a new assistant deputy minister, and she has asked him to write a fairly short-term report on how to move forward.

Kathy Corrigan, the New Democrat public safety critic, disagreed with Anton, saying B.C. is in an earthquake-prone zone, and the government has not taken the issue seriously.

Corrigan said the recent attempt to appoint former Liberal solicitor general John Les to consult about earthquake preparedness now seems like a pre-emptive response to Jones's report, which the government already had.

"I think the only emergency they were prepared for was a political emergency," she said.

Corrigan said an October 2012 magnitude-7.7 earthquake off Alaska's coast that could have caused a tsunami impacting Haida Gwaii should have been considered a "dry run."

An internal Emergency Management BC report also cited by Jones found the agency didn't have enough experienced personnel to respond to the incident, and their standard operating procedures were inadequate.

"We've had major earthquakes, devastating earthquakes in Japan and Chile and other places and this is a place that is vulnerable," added Corrigan. "We know that recent reports have said that we are more vulnerable even than we ever thought, that the damage could be devastating in British Columbia."

The province's Office of the Auditor General completed its first audit on earthquake preparedness and made similar recommendations in 1997.

But Jones said the government hasn't made the issue a priority.

He said Emergency Management BC has to compete for funding requests with public education and health care, and its budget has remained about the same since 2006, even though population and property values have increased.

Of Jones's nine recommendations, two targeted the provincial government and seven targeted the agency.

Jones has asked the provincial government to develop long-term earthquake preparedness goals and expectations for emergency management officials over the next five, 10 and 15 years. The government must also ensure those officials have the capacity to achieve those expectations.

The remaining seven recommendations ask Emergency Management BC to create and review plans, conduct regular earthquake drills, measure public readiness and report its own preparedness.

Anton said the provincial government has accepted all nine recommendations.