

Friday, May 1: Hasten seismic upgrades Nepalese quake reminds us of the urgency of the task in B. C.

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A Nepalese girl takes out belongings from her damaged house in Bhaktapur on the outskirts of Kathmandu on April 26. A team of Burnaby firefighters is leaving for Nepal Monday morning to help search for survivors buried in the rubble.

Photograph by: PRAKASH SINGH, AFP/Getty Images

Re: Disaster in Nepal, April 27

Coming just months after the B.C. government announced a decision to prolong the B.C. school seismic upgrade program, pushing it back 10 years to 2030 from 2020, we witness a devastating earthquake in Nepal.

Most of the buildings which collapsed in Nepal were older brick buildings of non-reinforced construction. How similar are they in type of construction used in older B.C. schools?

Washington state is nearing completion of their school seismic upgrade program. And make no mistake, when the megathrust quake hits B.C., if it occurs during school hours, children will almost certainly die.

I experienced a six-minute 9.0-magnitude megathrust earthquake while working in Japan on March 11, 2011. It was the most terrifying six minutes of my life.

However, I considered myself lucky to have been in Japan. Building construction is far superior and even though there was significant non-structural damage, no buildings collapsed in the region.

Furthermore, there were very few fires following the event mainly because automatic seismic gas valves are mandatory. Here at home, gas lines and water mains will rupture with horrific fire scenarios. Why this simple, relatively inexpensive device is not mandatory in southwest B.C., is beyond me.

School upgrades should be our first priority and after the latest Nepalese earthquake, it is time for our governments to get their act together, stop pointing fingers at one another and get the job done.

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