



FEMA

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30 Years of Hazard Mitigation, FEMA and the State of Washington highlight a local success story

BOTHELL, Wash. – Walk through the charming town of Port Townsend, and you likely won't notice some critical safety enhancements now in place to help protect visitors and residents during an earthquake.

The seismic retrofits help ensure the old buildings in this historic town survive when the ground shakes, and serve as a success story as the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the state's Emergency Management Division celebrate 30 years of FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP).

“These mitigation projects have not only helped make Port Townsend safer but they have helped preserve the town's distinctive charm,” said FEMA Regional Administrator Mike O'Hare. “In the last 30 years, FEMA has funded more than \$15 billion in mitigation projects, like the Port Townsend retrofit, saving the nation \$90 billion dollars on future disaster losses.”



Seismic retrofits have made Port Townsend more earthquake resilient.
Photo by: Gala Gulacsik

Following the Nisqually Earthquake in 2001, the same year Port Townsend celebrated its 150th anniversary, community and business leaders discussed priorities for future development and visioning. Their top priority was to increase the public safety of residents and tourists by adding seismic retrofitting to key locations while preserving the historic character of the city.

Like many cities in the Pacific Northwest, Port Townsend has an important network of underground tunnels, built in the late 1800s, below the historic district's sidewalks. These tunnels are still used by businesses and the community, serving as both storage space and building storefronts. Over time, the tunnel lids began to deteriorate, losing their ability to support the sidewalks above. This created concern that in an earthquake, the tunnels could collapse and result in severe damage or the collapse of the supported buildings.

With help from the state's Emergency Management Division, the city applied for, and received, HMGP funding to help retrofit the underground tunnels and sidewalks. Steel beams now add

additional support to help prevent the tunnels and sidewalks from collapsing during an earthquake.

Port Townsend is visited by more than two million tourists per year because of its “Distinctive Destination” designation for its historic character. Damage to the tunnels and sidewalks would disrupt the local business and tourist economies. To retrofit all sidewalks, smaller projects were leveraged using separate funding streams. The Washington State Hazard Mitigation Officer (SHMO) played a key role in the success of these projects by advocating for and supporting the City. The SHMO facilitated key communication between the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) program and key City contacts. The SHMO supported the City in meeting FEMA grant requirements in the application and grant management process.

The purpose of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program is to fund projects identified in mitigation plans to reduce damages from future disasters. The projects Port Townsend identified were the Water Street Tunnel Lids and East Business Tunnel Lids seismic retrofit projects. The total costs for the projects was \$2,898,255; they were completed in 2014.



More information about FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Assistance programs can be found at <https://www.fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-assistance>. Information about Washington Hazard Mitigation is available at <https://mil.wa.gov/emergency-management-division/grants/hazard-mitigation-grants>.

FEMA’s mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

EMD’s mission is to lead and coordinate mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery in Washington State to minimize the impact of disasters and emergencies on the people, property, environment and economy.