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The government's responsibilities for the preservation of cultural resources

CHERYLYN WIDELL [¶]

Despite local preservation ordinances since the 1930s, state landmarks' programs and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, there continues to be a black hole of understanding at all levels of government and with the public about what it means to be designated a historical property. In the best of circumstances, it is extremely difficult to walk into a town, announce that a property is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and if you are planning to use federal money, you will need to go through state and federal review.

In time of emergency when our human instinct is crying to gain control, to strike back and show strength, demolition nicely fills those needs. Woe to that person that says "No! Wait, shore it up, this property is historic, there might be money because your property is historic; you do not have to tear it down right away. Let us help you find a solution."

The role of assessing historic sites after the 1994 Northridge Earthquake fell to the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) through a SHPO representative and through a new and very innovative Programmatic Agreement among the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the California Office of Emergency Services, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and SHPO. Signed on 1 February 1994 by then Acting SHPO,

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Stade Craigo (two days before my appointment as SHPO), I cannot take credit for the innovations in the document which was mostly developed with FEMA by Hans Kreutzberg of the California SHPO and Lee Keatinge of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

Among the innovations were the assumption of normal Federal Agency responsibility of assessing areas of potential effects, determination of eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and Section 106 review of project effects, all to be conducted by the SHPO through a SHPO Representative to be paid by FEMA.

The contractor selected - prior to my appointment was the Historic Resources Group - Christy McAvoy and Bill Delvac, principals - located right in the middle of the affected area in Hollywood.

Some responsibilities in addition to the normal Section 106 process were:

- Staff the FEMA Disaster Field Office;
- Provide five-day turnaround times on determination of eligibility for listings and effects;
- Help in developing a large electronic data base of historic properties;
- Standard mitigation.

Final decision-making and appeal always remained with the SHPO.

This programmatic agreement worked; it worked very, very well. Through it we were able to:

- Provide knowledgeable individuals in a timely manner on a regular basis at a time when local travel was very tough;
- Tap into local knowledge and political expertise and a network of trust;
- Acquire additional design and engineering expertise unavailable from SHPO;
- Provide 24-hour service to National Historic Landmark Los Angeles Coliseum.

We reviewed 1,700 historic buildings; about 600 were eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This programmatic agreement will be used again for California floods and is used as a model throughout the United States by FEMA.

Coordinating federal, state and local government levels of activity

Earlier earthquakes were followed by difficult and strained coordination among the various levels of government. Now, with the programmatic agreement in hand, federal and state levels are working together in a coordinated effort. It is import to build support ahead of

time (before the disaster strikes). The key area to concentrate now is at the local level to build trust and understanding *outside* the preservation community.

After a disaster strikes, the first response is by the building officials of California who use the Applied Technology Council - 20 to placard buildings:

- Red: hazardous, do not enter;
- Yellow: may be hazardous, do not enter until there is a further assessment by a licensed engineer;
- Green: not hazardous, may be entered.

The rapid assessment conducted by the building officers in twenty minutes is not an in-depth engineering study. Consequently, a red tag does not mean that the building must be demolished. Unfortunately, the mass media misinterprets a red tag to mean demolition.

A damaged historic building may only be hazardous until it has been secured and stabilized. Shoring Standards are needed. Roy Harthorn, a Santa Barbara Building Official, is working on Shoring Standards for Damaged Buildings. We need more training through the Safety/Emergency Committee of California Building Officials and more use of shoring as an initial remedy to give time for full assessment and consideration. We also need more use of on-line assessment capability through powerbooks (portable computers) and we have initiated discussion with the Office of Emergency Services.

Finally, and most importantly, we must use current assessment surveys to target mitigation against seismic activity in the future. California Senate Bill 875 would provide tax credits for seismic retrofit. We need more education on mitigating hazards rather than more regulations. Seismic retrofit will not only save lives, but it will also help to preserve our irreplaceable cultural resources.

