The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation pertinent to cultural resources affected by disasters

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The State of Washington has not recently had a major disaster that has affected many historic or cultural resources. The eruption of Mount St. Helens in 1980 certainly affected some known and many unknown archaeological sites, but had little impact on historic resources. Floods and windstorms have some effects, but not to a major degree. Recently a mild earthquake south of Seattle damaged a Carnegie library in a small community.

However, we are told that a major earthquake could occur at any time and that its impact could be felt throughout western Washington. It is, of course, fortunate that we have not experienced many major disasters, but it also presents a problem because there is a sense of complacency, particularly when it comes to planning and mitigating for disasters. Response and recovery training is given far more attention than planning or funding for pre-event stabilization measures.

When speaking about the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, I usually focus on Standard No. 6 as their essence. It basically says that deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced, that severely deteriorated features should be replaced ‘in kind’, and missing elements should be replicated based on solid documentation.

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Mitigation measures I deal with, in regard to the Standards, are usually pretty straightforward and fundamental - for example:

- Tying floors and roofs to walls and parapets to roofs in unreinforced masonry buildings. The primary battles here are whether or not wall ties must penetrate through walls, and if so, their spacing, configuration and finish.

- The introduction of shear walls that will not only accomplish adequate stabilization of structures, but also do as little damage or removal of significant historic features as possible.

- The seismic bracing of buildings, particularly those with ‘soft-stories’. This is one of the most difficult measures to achieve because structural engineers and building officials will often tell us that adequate and cost effective stabilization cannot be done without cross-bracing which would be visible through existing windows. Often, after periods of negotiation, such elements can be redesigned, but sometimes a certain number of these intrusive elements must be accepted. Some have been approved for Investment Tax Credits by the National Park Service, if the bracing is painted out a neutral color.

Other common problem areas are retention of room and corridor configurations, replacement of doors and closing of transoms for fire safety, and window replacement.

For most projects involving the Standards, whether they be hazard mitigation related or not, negotiation between all parties involved is very important, including local preservation and building officials, architects, engineers, building owners and sometimes funding agents. While our State Historic Building Code is not mandatory unless adopted by local jurisdictions, it is often used as a guideline for designated properties by designers and local building officials in conjunction with Section 104(f) of the Uniform Building Code or the Uniform Code for Building Conservation.