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SEAW Engineers to Present Observations from Christchurch, New Zealand Earthquake Reconnaissance

Seattle, Washington, April 18, 2011 – Two local SEAW members recently returned from reconnaissance trips to Christchurch, New Zealand to observe, investigate, and study damage resulting from the February 22, 2011 earthquake. Dave Swanson, Principal at Reid Middleton traveled with the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute (EERI) “Learning from Earthquakes” team. Cale Ash, structural engineer at Degenkolb Engineers traveled with five other coworkers as part of the Degenkolb Recon Team.

Both engineers spent time assisting the Christchurch City Council in performing safety evaluations of earthquake damaged buildings in the heavily damaged City of Christchurch Central Business District (CBD). Both engineers agree that the shallow hypocenter of the Christchurch Earthquake and its impacts to that region are analogous to a shallow earthquake on the Seattle Fault and potential impacts to the Puget Sound region. There are many lessons from the Christchurch Earthquake that apply to Seattle and the Puget Sound region:

- Older buildings suffered the most damage and were the cause of most of the casualties.
- Many of Christchurch’s iconic churches were damaged and fully restoring these historic buildings may not be possible.
- Older unreinforced masonry buildings, as expected, typically performed poorly. The City of Seattle has over 800 similar unreinforced masonry buildings and they could be expected to be heavily damaged in an earthquake on the Seattle Fault.
- Masonry buildings that had been seismically retrofitted consistently sustained less damage than those that had not been seismically retrofitted.

Cale and Dave will be presenting their findings at the next monthly SEAW meeting at 6:00pm on Tuesday April 26, 2011. The public is invited to attend; for more information or to register for this event please visit www.seaw.org.

The Structural Engineers Association of Washington (SEAW) is a not-for-profit professional organization of leading structural engineers dedicated to the advancement of excellence in structural engineering through building code advocacy, continuing education, research, emergency preparedness, exchange of ideas, and mentoring. Over the past sixty years, SEAW has pursued issues affecting public safety and professional practice in structural engineering and SEAW members actively participate in the

development of building and material codes and standards at both local and national levels.

SEAW has organized earthquake reconnaissance teams in past earthquakes that have included the 1995 Kobe Earthquake, 1999 Taiwan Earthquake, 2001 Nisqually Earthquake, 2008 Wenchuan (China) Earthquake, 2010 Haiti Earthquake, and the 2010 Chile Earthquake. These efforts are to bring back lessons learned for our region's architects, engineers, and public officials to improve the seismic safety and awareness of our region. SEAW was also the principal author of the state-of-the-art study entitled "Scenario for a Magnitude 6.7 Earthquake on the Seattle Fault" published by the State of Washington Emergency Management Division and the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute in 2005.

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