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Owners of 80 Wellington CBD buildings ordered to do more invasive testing

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Collette Devlin

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More invasive testing has been ordered for about 80 buildings in Wellington's CBD.

CAMERON BURNELL/FAIRFAX NZ

Owners of about 80 buildings in Wellington's CBD have been ordered by Wellington City Council to do more invasive testing in the wake of the Kaikoura earthquake.

The move comes after early results from a Government investigation into Statistics House, at CentrePort, revealed buildings with similar characteristics, sited on soft soil, should be prioritised for detailed engineering inspections.

The orders fall under new powers handed to the council, allowing it to compel building owners to obtain and share assessments.

KEVIN STENT/FAIRFAX NZ

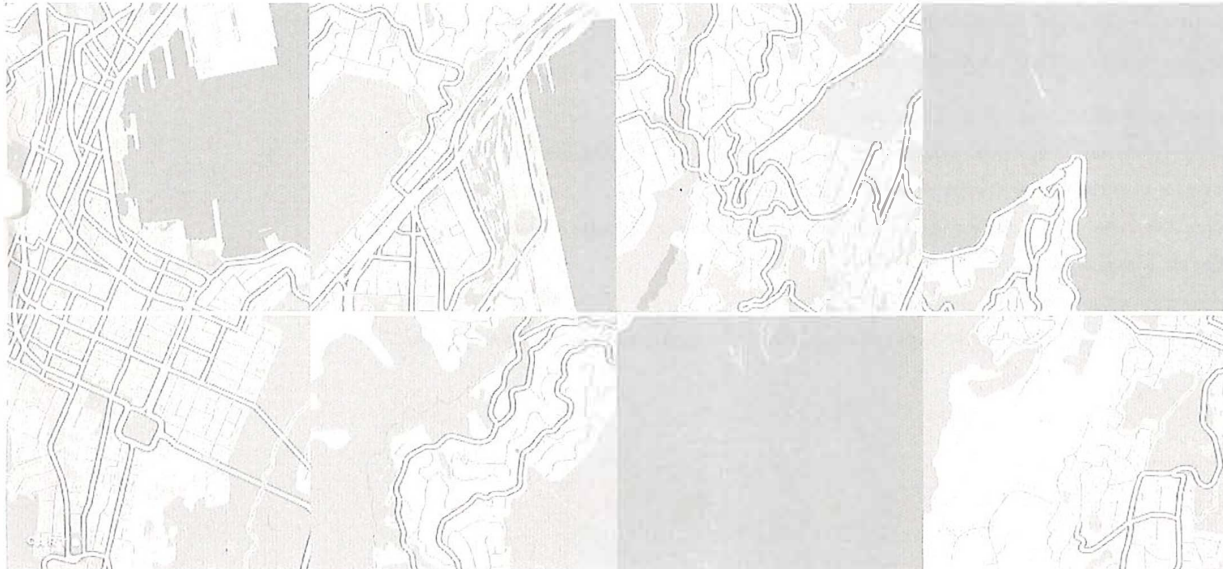
Early results from a Government investigation of earthquake-resilience failures at Statistics House have revealed about 80 Wellington CBD buildings of similar size will need further assessments.

However, no immediate action, such as closure, will need to be taken.

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Wellington Mayor Justin Lester is giving written notice to more than 250 people who own the buildings, ordering them to undertake further inspections.



Map created by @andrewfyers

Thousands of occupants of nearby buildings will also be notified by the council.

City council recovery manager Mike Mendonca said the buildings were all between four and 16 floors high, made out of reinforced concrete, with precast concrete slab floors.

The owners would be told to undertake "more invasive" testing of their buildings, which were spread throughout the CBD.

David Jones, 165 Lambton Quay, along with the Kirks tower, is on the council's list of about 80 buildings.

...pping up carpets and examining comers for a more thorough check, he said.

All the buildings on the list have undergone initial inspections, and some are already closed.

"This extra step is just to be absolutely sure," Mendonca said. "There is no evidence to indicate anything else."

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Wellington City Library has been identified as a building that will need another inspection.

The council was working closely with the Institution of Professional Engineers and Auckland University to come up with a detailed checklist of what to look for during the assessments, with engineers undergoing training on Monday night.

Building owners must inform the council by January 20 whether they have work underway.

"We are giving owners until February 10 to complete the work," Mendonca said.

MAARTEN HOLL/FAIRFAX NZ

The Amora Hotel, in Wakefield, will need more invasive tests.

"At that point we will expect building owners to have made decisions around what, if anything, they need to do with their buildings. We don't anticipate massive issues around evacuation."

Lester said: "This is all about what we can do now to make the city safer in the future.

"We want to weed out these buildings and better understand how they work. We want to make Wellington and its buildings as safe and resilient as possible."

MAARTEN HOLL/FAIRFAX NZ

Intercontinental Hotel, in Featherston St, is on the list.

He was hopeful the new information would not lead to more building closures.

Earlier this month, the council was given its emergency earthquake powers by acting Civil Defence Minister Gerry Brownlee.

On Monday, Brownlee said the owners of buildings had a duty to tenants under the health and safety and employment acts, and further inspections were the right thing to do. "It's a belt-and-braces exercise."

MAARTEN HOLL/FAIRFAX NZ

The Treasury building, at 1 The Terrace, will need more tests.

There were hundreds of buildings in Wellington, and 80 was not a large number.

"I expect the majority will be cleared quickly. It's a reasonable precaution."

City council chief executive Kevin Lavery said: "We want to use the powers and be proactive, and make sure we are well equipped for any further aftershocks."

KEVIN STENT/FAIRFAX NZ

Bowen House, on the left of the Beehive, is one of the 80 buildings that will need to be rechecked by engineers.

After the spate of recent building evacuations, Victoria University building science lecturer Geoff Thomas, who inspected buildings after the Canterbury quake in 2011, said not a lot of damage was immediately obvious in some buildings.

After the Kaikoura quake, shaking in buildings with more than eight storeys, on soft soils, had been close to the limit of what they were designed to handle.

"This raised red flags, because there was potential for significant damage."

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Wellington's largest office building, the Asteron Centre, is on the city council's list for a closer inspection.

If those buildings were subjected to the same level of shaking during an aftershock, near Wellington, they might collapse, he said.

Stuff and the Dominion Post have started an ongoing investigation into Wellington's earthquake response.

Work on the 'Faultlines' series started within days of the November 14 quake, when holes in the city's earthquake response became apparent.

'Faultlines' initially focuses on the management of earthquake-prone buildings.

Further results from the investigation will be published this week and in the New Year.

The 'Faultlines' team will continue work through 2017. You can contact the team via email newstips@stuff.co.nz or news@dompost.co.nz.

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