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OECD countries agree on steps to reduce earthquake risks for schoolchildren.

Children need safe learning environments, yet schools, which often serve also as emergency shelters, have collapsed in even moderate earthquakes. OECD countries have agreed that governments in earthquake-prone countries should take steps to prevent such occurrences, including improved controls on school design.

An “OECD Recommendation Concerning Guidelines on Earthquake Safety in Schools”, approved by the OECD’s governing council, sets out principles and elements for possible action programmes. Under a new OECD peer review process, governments will assist each other in formulating and implementing policies for improved earthquake safety in schools.

The OECD Recommendation follows a meeting organised in February 2004 by the OECD and the U.S.-based non-profit organisation GeoHazards International at which 30 acknowledged experts from 14 countries met to discuss the risks to schoolchildren from earthquakes.

In many countries, students and teachers face risks of injury and loss of life due to the faulty design and construction of school buildings which collapse in the event of earthquakes or other disasters. Such tragedies often occur because available technology is not applied and existing laws and regulations are not enforced.

The experts agreed that improvements in the design and construction of schools can often be made quickly and at reasonable cost that would significantly lower the seismic risk to schools and help prevent further injury and death. (Reports from this meeting were published in August 2004 in *Keeping Schools Safe in Earthquakes*.)

For further information, journalists are invited to contact Richard Yelland, OECD Programme on Educational Building (tel: + 33 1 45 24 92 60, Richard.Yelland@oecd.org). The “OECD Recommendation Concerning Earthquake Safety in Schools” is available to download at www.oecd.org/edu/schoolsafety. The OECD publication *Keeping Schools Safe in Earthquakes* is available through the OECD's Online Bookshop at www.oecdbookshop.org and to journalists on the password protected website (<http://www1.oecd.org/media/journalists/journalists.htm>). To obtain a password, please contact the OECD Media Relations Division (news.contact@oecd.org).