



OVERVIEW

Amend the “Good Samaritan Law” to Provide Indemnification to Statewide Volunteer Organizations

KEY POINTS

- Help maintain the State’s valuable resource of architects, engineers, and building officials who volunteer in cases of disaster
- Protect organizations that train volunteers
- Improve Washington States preparedness in the case of a disaster
- Extend the law to cover professional associations, organizations and individuals that organize, train, credential, and call up their members to be deployed as post-disaster volunteer emergency workers

The AIA supports legislation that will provide liability protection for organizations who train, register, and credential volunteers to respond to natural and man-made disasters.

Trained volunteers have been critical in helping our local communities respond to disasters here in Washington and all over the world. After the Oso landslide, over 600 personnel, including volunteers, worked on landslide recovery operations. Architect and Engineering volunteers are called upon to assess structures following earthquakes and other disasters. The Nisqually Earthquake and others in the US, the 2010-2011 earthquakes in New Zealand, the 2001 twin tower collapse in New York, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and Superstorm Sandy in 2012 are all examples of disasters where volunteer architects, engineers, and building officials played critical roles in the local response.

Currently the “Good Samaritan Law” (RCW 38.52.180) protects individual volunteer’s liability in the event of a declared disaster. However, according to the Washington State Attorney General’s office, there is no liability protection for organizations maintaining a registry of volunteers. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that train, register, credential, and organize individual volunteers to respond to disasters could be found to be liable. In Washington, statewide NGOs that provide registration or certification include the following:

- American Institute of Architects (AIA)
- Structural Engineers Association of Washington (SEAW)
- International Code Council (ICC)
- Washington Association of Building Officials (WABO)

Past experience with major disasters demonstrates that local jurisdictions will quickly exhaust their available resources in the unfortunate case of such an event. Currently, there is an extensive network of architects and engineers with training in safety assessment of damaged structures in the State of Washington, who can supplement the efforts of the local jurisdictions. The training of these professionals has been ongoing for almost two decades. Not protecting the organizations that offer these training programs and maintain their roles could put this resource in jeopardy.