



STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION OF MASSACHUSETTS
One Walnut Street | Boston, MA 02108 | www.seamass.org

SEAMASS Joins with SEI to Establish Structural Engineers Emergency Response Plan (SEER) in MA

by Jeffrey W. Struble, P.E.

Members of SEAMASS have joined volunteers from the Structural Engineering Institute (SEI) of the BSCES to establish a standing committee of volunteer structural engineers that can assist emergency management agencies in responding to large-scale disasters that overwhelm local authorities' technical facilities. Known as the Structural Engineers Emergency Response (SEER) Committee, it will be the Massachusetts chapter of what is hoped to become a nation-wide network of such volunteer groups that would be trained and ready to be deployed after disasters occur to rapidly evaluate widespread damage to buildings and infrastructure when called upon by local/regional Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJ's). This is a re-start of attempt begun by SEAMASS in 2007 to establish such a group.

The network was initiated by the National Council of Structural Engineers Associations (NCSEA) after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. The response to that large-scale disaster by local structural engineers demonstrated the need for having a pool of trained structural engineering professionals ready to assist AHJ's in such times of crisis and since then, several natural disasters with similar scopes of damage have occurred that prove the wisdom of being so prepared. In our own region, a multi-discipline emergency response group in Rhode Island was called out to assist local authorities after Hurricane Sandy damaged large areas of coastal building stock. That SEER group was effective in reducing the time it took to assess the overall damage and provided invaluable data to RI's Emergency Management service that hastened the award of disaster relief funds from the federal government. Other SEA's in our neighboring states are being formed, too and should be available to assist each other should the need arise.

SEAMASS members including John Born, Michael Fillion, David Grandpre, John Looney, Peter Quigley and Jeffrey Struble are participating in the formation of the MA SEER Committee. They attend monthly meetings, held at Northeastern University, of the group headed by Mehrdad Sasani, current chair of SEI. These meetings are establishing the needed training for SEER members to function effectively within the incident command system used by emergency management organizations and will be organizing a kick-off training session for all interested structural engineers who would like to volunteer for the new SEER group in September of this year at Northeastern's Kostas Research Institute in Burlington, MA. Check your future SEAMASS announcements and newsletters for more details on this important upcoming event. There is also pending legislation in the Massachusetts legislature for a Good Samaritan Act for second responders like SEER plan members that would protect them from being legally liable for their volunteer efforts, which the SEER Committee is supporting vigorously. Such an act is crucial for the participation of professional engineers in the SEER plan.

Future SEAMASS announcements will publish recommendations on how SEAMASS members can contact their local legislators to advocate passage of this important act.