

Pre-1984 buildings and earthquake risk, including two Chiriqui hospitals

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Summary

UTP engineers explained that buildings put up before Panama's first seismic code of 1984 — including David's José Domingo de Obaldía (1934) and Rafael Hernández (1974) hospitals — may be more vulnerable, and called for a census and reinforcement of essential structures.

Details (summary of the article)

La Prensa reports on a press conference by structural and seismic engineering specialists from the Technological University of Panama (UTP) about buildings erected before the country's first earthquake-resistant code of 1984. Ramiro Vargas noted that the 1984 code and its 1994, 2004, 2014 and 2021 updates apply only to new projects, and there is no general obligation to upgrade older buildings, which can therefore be more vulnerable. Óscar Ramírez stressed that Panama is highly seismic, with around 800 quakes a year, and that the active Pedro Miguel and Limón faults near Panama City could produce magnitude 7 events. The newspaper listed older buildings as examples — not as a vulnerability diagnosis — including Chiriquí's Hospital José Domingo de Obaldía in David (1934) and Hospital Regional Dr. Rafael Hernández (1974), plus Panama City landmarks, schools and housing blocks. The experts said the state cannot afford to demolish or retrofit everything, but should urgently census and inspect pre-1984 public buildings and critical infrastructure that must keep working after a disaster: hospitals, schools, police and fire stations, SINAPROC offices and bridges. They suggested this data be collected through the INEC housing census. Retrofitting involves an engineering assessment, structural pathology study and computer simulation, then measures such as enlarging columns and beams, adding shear walls and energy dampers, and strengthening foundations and connections.

Original (es)

Edificios anteriores a 1984: cuáles son, qué riesgos enfrentan y cómo reforzarlos

Una construcción sismorresistente se caracteriza por su ductilidad, que le permite deformarse sin sufrir una rotura súbita.