

ISO – City of Palo Alto Public Protection Classification

Background Information

ISO collects information from communities in the United States on their adoption and enforcement of building codes. ISO analyzes the data using its Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule (BCEGS™) and then assigns a BCEGS™ Classification number to the community. The classification number—which ranges from 1 to 10—measures a jurisdiction's commitment to the adoption and enforcement of building codes affecting the construction of new buildings. Class 1 indicates the most favorable classification of commitment to the adoption and enforcement of building codes.

ISO's commitment to polling each building code enforcement agency on a regular basis is important to the program - periodic surveying helps determine if a community has made any significant changes since its last field evaluation. This ongoing effort is designed to re-evaluate each community at approximate 5-year intervals or sooner if changes indicate a potential revision to the classification number.

The purpose of the ISO report is fourfold:

1. To summarize a community's scoring under the criterion contained in the BCEGS™™ program.
2. To identify opportunities for communities desiring to improve their BCEGS™ classification number.
3. To assist a community in understanding how other jurisdictions with similar needs address building code adoption and enforcement.
4. To provide hazard mapping information important in planning and developing a sustainable community.

The effectiveness of local building codes can have a profound effect on how the structures in our community will fare in an earthquake or other natural disaster. Studies conducted following recent natural disasters concluded that total losses might have been as much as 50% less if all structures in the area had met current building codes. Building-code enforcement can have a major influence on the economic well-being of a municipality and the safety of its citizens. Insurance Services Office (ISO) helps distinguish amongst communities with effective building-code adoption and enforcement through a comprehensive program called the Building Code Effectiveness Grading Schedule (BCEGS™).

The concept behind ISO's BCEGS™ is simple - Municipalities with well-enforced, up-to-date codes demonstrate better loss experience, and their citizens' insurance rates can reflect that. The prospect of minimizing catastrophe-related damage and ultimately lowering insurance costs gives communities an incentive to enforce their building codes rigorously.

The attached management report was created specifically for Palo Alto based on a BCEGS™ survey conducted on 5/10/2012. This report can help us evaluate our community's building-code enforcement services utilizing benchmarking data collected throughout the country. The report is designed to give our management team an expanded perspective for dealing with the important issues surrounding effective building code enforcement.

History

The first ISO evaluation report was received on 3/8/2006 and the Building Division received a class 3 for residential and class 4 for all other construction. One of the driving reasons for the rating was California's lack of code adoption update with continued use of the modified 1997 Uniform Building Codes modified to California Standards via 2001 Title 24 Building Codes. In 2007 California adopted and amended the 2006 International Codes and when adopted by local jurisdictions to also amend their current ISO rating.

The City of Palo Alto ISO survey was delivered on 5/10/2012 and resulted in a BCEGS™ rating of **class 2** (up from 3) for 1 and 2 family dwellings and a **class 2** (up from 4) for all other construction.

Data Collection and Analysis

ISO has evaluated over 7,000 building code enforcement agencies across the United States. In each of these communities, three elements of building code adoption and enforcement are reviewed. These three elements are the administration of codes, plan review and field inspection.

➤ Administration of Codes:

- ISO evaluates the administrative support for code enforcement within the jurisdiction - the adopted building codes and the modifications of those codes through ordinance, code enforcer qualifications, experience and education, zoning provisions, contractor/builder licensing requirements, public awareness programs, the building department's participation in code development activities, and the administrative policies and procedures.
- This section represents 54% of the analysis in the BCEGS™ program.

➤ Plan Review Division:

- Consideration is given to determine staffing levels, personnel experience, performance evaluation schedules, and the level of review of construction documents for compliance with the adopted building code of the jurisdiction being graded.
- This section represents 23% of the analysis.

➤ Field inspection:

- Consideration is given to determine staffing levels, personnel experience, performance evaluation schedules, and the level of the agency's review of building construction.
- This section also represents 23% of the analysis.

The information necessary to determine the BCEGS™ classification number was collected from the nationwide community of building officials through a combination of on-site interviews and completed questionnaires.

Where We Go From Here

With a two-fold benefit to the citizens of Palo Alto resulting from improved ISO rating, financially through reduced insurance rates and increased building and property safety through the building permit processes, the Divisions focus is to achieve the top rating of **class 1**.

We believe this to be readily achievable with only minor revisions to the survey document information and collaboration with our community. The first step is awareness of the potential and from there development and implantation of a Blueprint for success.

The ISO 5/10/2012 report has been attached for details specific to achievement of the current ratings as well as the criteria necessary to improve