



**Partner Profile – Western States Seismic Policy Council – Patricia Sutch,
Executive Director**

Q: What is the background/history of your organization?

A: The Western States Seismic Policy Council (WSSPC) was the first earthquake consortia to form as a result of the passage of the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Act in 1977 and the establishment of the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) the following year. The first meeting was held in 1979 with 8 western states in attendance. By 1983 there were 13 member states in WSSPC. Over the years membership grew to include 3 Pacific territories, British Columbia and Yukon. The annual meetings were organized by the western state members until WSSPC incorporated in 1996, when subsequent annual meetings were centrally organized. In 2000 we initiated the quadrennial National Earthquake Conference. The unique thing about WSSPC is that its membership incorporates earthquake scientists with emergency managers and representatives from seismic councils and commissions for those western states that have them, for a total of 39 agency members from 13 western states, 3 Pacific territories, a Canadian Province, and Canadian territory. WSSPC's focus has been on how to transfer knowledge of the earthquake hazard to emergency management and to encourage adoption of regionally consistent policies that are intended to reduce earthquake losses.

Our 40th anniversary will be in 2019!

Q: How did you get interested in research/disaster safety/response and recovery/resilience?

A: I remember learning at an impressionable age about the 1964 M9.2 Great Alaska Earthquake and Tsunami. My father encouraged my interest in the natural world and gave me "Geology Illustrated", a book that interpreted the geology shown in the pictures. That interest, combined with my love of the outdoors, led me to choose geology as a major in college. I earned a B.A. degree in Earth Sciences and M.S. in Engineering Geology with an emphasis on seismic hazards. As an engineering geologist I am interested in applying the science and communicating the hazard through facilitating gatherings of multidisciplinary groups.

Q: What do you see to be the future of earthquake science/engineering/research/outreach/response and recovery to increase resiliency? What do you think is moving the cause of resilience forward?

A: There's nothing like an event – earthquake, tsunami, hurricane, or flood – to galvanize individuals and communities to think about how to mitigate the next disaster. Once people experience what an earthquake is like, they really understand. What we would like to do is interrupt the reactionary cycle so that preparedness and mitigation actions take place proactively before the earthquake. The challenge is that earthquakes occur infrequently or may not even happen in our lifetime, and thus receives a lower priority in our everyday lives.

One of the ways we can keep earthquakes alive is to develop a culture of preparedness through collaboration among multidisciplinary partnerships and repetition of the same messages.

Q: Can you tell us about a specific project your organization is working on in earthquake safety/science/engineering/research/resilience/outreach field?

A: One of our recently completed projects was working with our members to prepare a pocket-sized Earthquake Emergency Handbook. The handbook resulted from the 2008 Wells, Nevada earthquake that occurred in a rural area and a recommendation from the Incident Commander who was faced with responding to his first earthquake. The handbook provides earthquake-specific actions to take before, during, and after the earthquake and Appendices to understand earthquakes and evaluate post-earthquake building safety. Hard copies may be ordered or a pdf downloaded from the following web link:

<https://www.wsspc.org/resources-reports/publications/>.

Q: Do you have any other comments or words of wisdom for our readers?

A: This personal anecdote illustrates the power of educating people what to do in the event of an earthquake. During the M6.9 Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989 my kids and I were in different rooms in our house. My six-year old son had been in kindergarten for 6 weeks and had experienced one earthquake drill in school where they learned to “Drop, Cover, and Hold On”. When the shaking started, he got his 3-year-old sister underneath a table with him. Meanwhile, his mother learned that being in a door frame was not the best place to be, as the door was swinging back and forth. I was so grateful that he had learned what to do and put it into practice to keep him and his sister safe.