



The Montana Earthquake Working Group
Strategic Plan, 2025-2030
September 2025

Executive Summary

Montana has experienced rapid population growth in the last 15 years. Between 2010 and 2022, the state's population increased by 13.3%. Many of the state's fastest-growing population centers lie in seismically active zones where the data needed to fully understand the earthquake hazard and risk are limited. If an earthquake occurs, numerous people could be injured or killed. Infrastructure and critical facilities would also be at risk of severe damage. According to Montana's 2023 Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan, 624,084 people across the state live in areas vulnerable to earthquakes, with the majority living in the seismically active western region of the state.

Between 2025 and 2030, the Montana Earthquake Working Group (MEWG) seeks to expand its reach to ensure communities are aware of their seismic risk and to facilitate state- and locally led risk reduction activities. The MEWG consists of experts from Montana Disaster and Emergency Services (MT-DES), the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute (EERI), the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology (MBMG), other state agencies, and local community representation. This working group formed out of a shared concern for seismic impacts to our state and communities and an interest in making Montana more resilient to seismic hazards through research, mitigation, and awareness.

Members of the MEWG co-created this strategic plan in 2025 with input from federal and state partners. While writing this plan, the MEWG considered how to best engage communities in mitigation-focused action, putting Montana on a path toward seismic safety.

Through its visioning process, the MEWG developed a mission and vision to guide its work:

Mission: To increase earthquake safety in the state, the Montana Earthquake Working Group (MEWG) advances research, mitigation activities, and public awareness.

Vision: A Montana whose people, property, and economy are prepared for and resilient to earthquakes.

Throughout this strategic plan, the MEWG outlines how it will work toward its mission and vision over the next five years. The plan includes a background and history of earthquakes in Montana, setting the scene for why this work is critical now. It discusses the MEWG's guiding principles and lays out an action plan with details and achievable steps to implement it.

This scope of this plan reflects the group's current capacities and capabilities. As of this writing, the MEWG is a non-regulatory advisory group made up of volunteer members who advise on issues relating to seismic safety across the state. With additional funding, partners, authorities, or state-level support, the MEWG could expand the scope of what it is able to accomplish. It can then become the main source of information on, and coordinator of, statewide risk identification and risk reduction activities.

This strategic plan illustrates the hazards (natural events that are potentially harmful) and risk (the impact of a hazard that can cause damage, injury, or loss of life) that Montana faces. The plan also assesses the potential to reduce that risk with proper research, mitigation, and awareness. This is the first step in a long process, and it represents a significant step forward for seismic mitigation in Montana. It also serves as a framework to advance mitigation for other significant risks across the state.

To advance this strategic plan, the MEWG and its state partners must commit to the following goals and objectives:

1. Develop and maintain a comprehensive understanding of the state's seismic hazard and risk.
2. Identify opportunities for risk reduction activities through mitigation planning and community engagement. Assist in the implementation of those actions.
3. Build community engagement and public awareness around seismic safety.
4. Build capacity and capability for seismic safety work.