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Haiti setting itself up for another fall, experts say

Released on 08/02/2010



Structural engineers visiting Haiti have said they are extremely concerned about premature and unsafe rebuilding.

They say the work is perpetuating the very poor construction practices that caused hundreds of thousands of collapses and more than 170,000 deaths in the magnitude-7 earthquake that struck on Jan. 12 with an epicenter 25 kilometers from Port-au-Prince.

Andre Filiatrault, University of Buffalo civil engineering professor and director of the Multidisciplinary Center for Earthquake Engineering Research (MCEER), told *Engineering News-Record* that he saw people salvaging rebar out of broken concrete from the rubble of pancaked buildings.

He was in Haiti with other engineers to perform building damage assessments.

“They would then straighten the bars and resell them for new construction,” he said, which is improper because the bars would have experienced “large inelastic deformations and would be very brittle after restraightening.”

Filiatrault says he also saw Haitians making cosmetic repairs of structural damage. These kinds of activities need to be “prohibited by the government” to improve the construction quality in Haiti, he said. “It is essential to discuss the establishment and enforcement of Haitian building construction standards with local agencies.”

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