

THE UPDATE

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The goal of our monthly update is to provide information on timely matters that may impact your practice and professional interests.



ENABLING BUILDINGS TO WITHSTAND EARTHQUAKES

At Lehigh University researchers are conducting technology trials on a structural system that could enable buildings to withstand earthquakes. It is called a "self-centering system" and employs large steel bands enclosed in plastic and friction plates to adjust to and reduce the impact of earthquake tremors. The steel bands are intended to allow the building's beams and columns to shift structurally during an earthquake and then return to their initial position when the tremors cease.



THE FIX IS ON FOR LAKE OKEECHOBEE IN FLORIDA

Earlier this month during a 2 day visit to Florida, President Bush announced that \$40 million has been allocated in the federal budget to let the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers correct the precarious condition of the 70-year old earthen dike surrounding Lake Okeechobee in central Florida and prevent a similar situation as had occurred last year in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The failure of this dike would endanger the lives of more than 40,000 citizens living adjacent to the lakes as well as hundreds of thousands people in the region. The clock may be ticking this hurricane season-let's hope not.



REAL-TIME MAPS TO MAKE CITIES MORE LIVABLE

At MIT's Sensible City Laboratory researchers lead by Italian architect, Carlo Ratti can now track anyone's movements using MIT's wireless network by simply monitoring the access points to which their devices are connected. His research is aimed at developing real-time maps

from location data that provide insight into the movement of people and the flow of traffic through cities. Although somewhat troubled by privacy concerns, Ratti advocates applying this technology through a collaboration between city planners and telecommunications companies to develop infrastructures to safeguard individual privacy while permitting access to real-time, dynamic city maps that could streamline transportation as individuals plan their movements and timing to the overall traffic flow in the city.



A SAFER WORLD ONE FAILURE AT A TIME ?

Duke University engineering Professor Henry Petroski specializes in studying failure in design and construction. He believes that "the whole philosophy of engineering education is to prepare you to do things you had never done"; that "nothing is impervious to failure; that systems that need mistake-free performance eventually fail themselves and that devices used for a particular purpose might fail if used for something else". For example, engineers must now assess what could occur if radioactive waste were to be stored for a million years in the Yucca mountains in Nevada. In our opinion, can we afford to be wrong when trying to predict what society will be like by then?

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