

**PSBJ Op-ed**  
**Don't be Oblivious to Risks**  
**By**  
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Risks are inherent to being alive in our modern world. While our ancestors might have been concerned about being eaten by wild animals, we warn the children of today about crossing the street, the dangers of drugs, binge drinking, stranger-danger, and the like. If only we could get adults to think twice about looking for dangers before physically locating or relocating their homes and businesses.

As Americans we are generally positive people. It is part of our cultural physic to look at things in a positive manner. Why else would so many people undertake the risks of being an entrepreneur, be it a restaurateur or a new digital start-up? We only see the possibilities of success and minimize the known risks. The factoid for example that 60 percent of restaurants close or change ownership in the first year of business, with 80 percent closing within the first five years.

In choosing where to locate a business there are many factors to consider. What type of business do you have? For retail, being in a business district and on the ground floor is vitally important. What other businesses are around you matters. You don't want to be a high-end clothing boutique located near discount stores. For businesses with employees that need to commute to get to work, closeness to transit is a key factor in attracting and retaining a skilled workforce.

When purchasing a home or just renting an apartment the above characteristics of close to work and close to transit are major factors for a region with clogged roadways which are only getting worse, day-by-day. Other factors that come with figuring out where to live include proximity to entertainment and dining options. If you have children, daycare and schools become a significant consideration, along with the ability for places where children can play safely. One additional plus that people love to have is to be near the water or to have a view. Thus, those homes, condos and apartments that have "the view" come at a higher price.

Here is the rub that I see with all of the above. There is nary a thought about the risks that come with human caused or natural disasters. If people consider living by a rail line or major highway, they are concerned about the noise, but likely don't consider the possibility of a chemical spill of highly toxic hazardous materials.

Individuals and businesses still find the vibe of Pioneer Square as being appealing as a place to work and to live. Yet, from a seismic hazard perspective I cannot think of another place with a higher life-safety risk of extreme shaking in an earthquake and a

wide selection of building inventory that is composed of unreinforced masonry buildings, (URM) that are very likely to “pancake/total collapse” in a significant earthquake.

People love to be near water. The sound of waves crashing, or just the idyllic view are OK, yet one only needs to watch and see the number of extreme rain and flood events happening currently throughout the United States to know that “river front property” may, in the future, become closer to the river or bluff than you thought possible.

A recent [M9 seismic study by the University of Washington’s Geology](#) Department found that it is not just URM buildings that we should worry about, but to also look at relatively modern buildings. They may have been built to code with better construction methods than those used in Pioneer Square, yet today are now known to also be dangerous and susceptible to significant damages. This includes to the point of toppling over or even collapsing in a long duration earthquake from the damaging seismic waves expected from a Cascadia Fault Subduction Earthquake.

Finally, one the topics of the UW research mentioned above includes this, “[An] Assessment of trade-offs policy makers and public are willing to make between investments in preparation for and responses to earthquake hazards in Washington.” This then is the crux of what I am saying here. If you are making a physical move, make an informed decision. Don’t be oblivious to the risks that are all around us and know what you are “trading off” in order establish a new business location or chose a place to call home. Disasters do happen and one day, one of them is likely to impact you. It is only a matter of when and not if.

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