

Rep. Matsui Amendment Will Improve Public Safety Enhanced Building Codes Will Improve Preparedness

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Washington D.C. - Today, Rep. Doris Matsui (CA-05) offered an amendment to the Homeowner's Defense Act (H.R. 3355) to improve public safety standards, and help communities and homeowners be better prepared to withstand natural disasters. Reps. Chris Murphy (CT-05), Melissa Bean (IL-08) and John Larson (CT-01) coauthored the amendment. The amendment was passed by a voice vote.

The overall goal of the Homeowner's Defense Act is to provide insurance coverage to homeowners in disaster-prone communities. The amendment offered by Rep. Matsui encourages local governments to develop plans to help mitigate the effects of natural disasters, and require states to adopt enhanced standards for building codes.

"In California, we have lived through major earthquakes, landslides, wildfires and floods. These disasters are inevitable, which is why we must plan now to make our communities safer and more stable," said Rep. Matsui.

Preparedness is the first step towards responsible public safety, an issue Rep. Matsui took action on when she introduced the Safe Building Codes Act on Oct. 22, 2007. It will create incentives for states to adopt and enforce high safety standards. Under this timely and important legislation, states that enact comprehensive building codes would qualify for additional disaster relief funding. States that have mandatory statewide codes and have enforcement measures in place would be eligible for an additional four percent of federal disaster relief funds.

In the recent wildfires in southern California, buildings and structures suffered far less damage in recent disasters in large part due to having stronger building codes in place. While the fires spread over more than 800 square miles, neighborhoods built under newer building codes were spared. Current state law requires new homes in high-risk areas to be built with fire-resistant materials and surrounded by a 100-foot perimeter cleared of most brush and other wildfire fuels.

"I am very pleased that Congresswoman Matsui is taking the initiative on this issue. I live in a development that survived the fires, while homes just outside of the development perished. The only reason my home and the rest of the development are still standing is because it follows more modern, stricter building codes. Bringing this issue to light will preserve homes and save lives," said Jorge Llorente, California resident.

"Stronger building codes are a key component of improving the capability of our structures to withstand catastrophes. Improving our emergency preparedness will also help to alleviate the financial strain on American taxpayers who foot the bill of disaster relief," said Rep. Matsui.

Research has shown that having nationally-recognized standards for building codes can provide a tremendous level of protection. Buildings would be more likely to withstand higher impacts, helping them to remain intact in the event of a natural disaster. According to the Louisiana State University hurricane Center, of the \$10 billion in damage to homes as a result of Hurricane Katrina, 65 percent could have been saved by having modern building codes in place.

"The building standards we incorporate now will make a significant difference in making our communities more stable. In the thriving cities in California and nationwide, the building codes we enforce now will greatly reduce disaster-related property damage and injuries," said Rep. Matsui.

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