



Contact: Phil Anderson
(202) 315-5100

Senate Hearing Highlights Need For Strong Building Codes

(Washington, DC – July 20, 2011) – The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) told the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery and Intergovernmental Affairs yesterday that mitigation and strong building codes are important to protecting property and lives from natural disasters.

FEMA Deputy Administrator Richard Serino testified at a hearing on the national response to the 2011 storms that “mitigation efforts provide value to the American people by creating safer communities and reducing the loss of life and property.”

Serino cited a 2005 National Institute of Building Sciences study that found every \$1 spent on various mitigation activities reduced response and recovery costs by \$4. He told Senators that FEMA considers stringent building codes to be an important mitigation activity.

Thomas “Mike” Womack, the Executive Director of the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency, reinforced FEMA’s position on mitigation and building codes by testifying that strong building codes have helped make his home state safer and more resilient.

The BuildStrong Coalition applauded Chairman Mark Pryor (D-AR) for holding the hearing and for his support of mitigation as an effective strategy to reduce the devastation of natural disasters. Pryor opened yesterday’s hearing by declaring, “we’re all familiar with the facts about mitigation; for every \$1 invested in mitigating risk, \$4 is saved. Mitigation creates safer communities by reducing the loss of life and property while also lessening the financial impact on federal, state and local governments.

“The BuildStrong Coalition looks forward to working with Chairman Pryor, Ranking Member Paul and members of the committee as they consider the best way to improve the nation’s response to natural disasters. Several natural catastrophes have already made 2011 the highest loss year for disasters on record. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims of these recent tragedies, compelling us to advance legislation to help mitigate future devastation. It is vital that Congress take immediate steps to encourage the adoption of model building codes, a proven and cost effective way to reduce the economic losses of natural disasters,” said Jimi Grande, the chairman of the BuildStrong Coalition.

Under The Safe Building Code Incentive Act, which was introduced on June 1 by Congressmen Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), Albio Sires (D-NJ) and Richard Hanna (R-NY), states that adopt and enforce nationally recognized model building codes for residential and commercial structures would qualify for an additional four percent of funding available for post-disaster grants. The program, which would not require any additional appropriation since it would draw funds from the existing Disaster Relief Fund, would be administered by FEMA. 16 states currently enforce building codes that would already qualify for the additional four percent funding. Another 15 states would qualify with minor changes to current laws and regulations.

“The evidence is overwhelming. Strong building codes save lives, property and taxpayer money. We strongly urge lawmakers to pass The Safe Building Code Incentive Act this year. This legislation will encourage states to adopt model building codes that are a proven first line of defense against natural disasters,” Grande said.

In written testimony submitted to the committee, the BuildStrong Coalition cited additional research conducted by Louisiana State University’s Hurricane Center, which found that strong building codes would have reduced wind damage from Katrina by 80 percent and economic losses in Mississippi from a similar level storm by \$3.1 billion.

BuildStrong is a coalition of national business and consumer organizations, corporations and emergency management officials dedicated to stronger building codes, in order to protect homes and buildings from the devastation of natural disasters. For a complete list of members and additional information, please visit www.buildstrongamerica.com.