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## House Subcommittee to Consider Increasing Post-Disaster Funds for Code-Adopting States

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House Subcommittee to Consider Increasing Post-Disaster Funds for Code-Adopting States

[Safe Building Code Incentive Act: State by State](#)



*\*Updated Tuesday, July 24*

On Tuesday, the [House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management](#) held a hearing to discuss the Safe Building Code Incentive Act (HR 2069) introduced last June by Reps. Mario Diaz-Balart (R- Fla.), Albio Sires (D-N.J.) and Richard Hanna (R-N.Y.) . The bill would provide additional post-disaster funding to states that voluntarily adopt and enforce model building codes.

“Some of these [disasters] are inevitable, but we can certainly cut the cost and the amount of damage that is done with stronger building codes,” Rep. Jeff Denham (R-Calif.), chairman of the subcommittee, said last week during a press briefing to promote the hearing.

Denham said that in the last few years, the U.S. suffered 14 natural disasters that cost at least \$1 billion each. In addition, the [Build Strong Coalition](#) found economic losses related to natural disasters equaled \$52 billion in the

U.S. in 2011.

Under the incentive act states that voluntarily adopt and enforce the most recent nationally recognized model building codes for residential and commercial structures qualify for an additional 4% of funding available for post-disaster grants.

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"The fire and emergency services know that model commercial and residential building and fire codes will help prevent the tragic loss caused by extreme weather and natural disasters," Chief Hank C. Clemmensen — first vice president of the [International Association of Fire Chiefs](#) and chief of the Palatine Rural Fire Protection District of Inverness, Ill. — testified. "Unfortunately, some jurisdictions do not adopt model building codes or update them until after a disaster occurs."

Clemmensen testified that a large portion of the damage to buildings and danger to public and first responders' lives could be avoided with enforced building. This has been noted in a 2009 World Bank report that highlights the role California's strict adherence to tough zoning and building codes played in reducing earthquake fatalities.

In his testimony, Clemmensen raised three issues for the committee to consider:

- The importance of states adopting model codes, including residential fire-sprinkler requirements, without making substantial changes
- The importance of allowing local jurisdictions to adopt more stringent codes than the state model codes The importance of ensuring that both building and fire codes are covered by this legislation

Currently, 16 states enforce building codes that already would qualify for the additional 4% funding. Another 15 states would qualify with minor changes to current laws and regulations. ([See list.](#))

"We want to make sure that we're empowering states to put in the kind of safeguards that they need," Denham said. "Obviously, we have a number of natural disasters across the nation that may vary from state to state. ... Certainly there is a set of standards that we can put in place from a national perspective, meet some basic criteria, but then empower each of the states to improve their criteria that would match a higher standard."

FEMA would administer the program, which would not require any additional appropriations, as it would draw funds from the existing Disaster Relief Fund.

"FEMA runs short every year," Denham said. "We can leverage our dollar and incentivize states to spend the money up front to be able to have a greater impact for FEMA dollars."

Denham said the hearing was first of several hearings on the bill. The subcommittee is looking for additional testimony, including examples of disaster shortcomings and successes, for future hearings.

"Standardized building codes promote a level and consistent playing field for design professionals, suppliers and builders," he said. "And as we're building things across the nation or redeveloping buildings, by having a standardized system, we can cut costs as well."

Denham hopes that Congress will push the legislation through this year so it can have an impact before storm season hits next year.

"Most importantly, it's about saving lives," he said.

To watch a live webcast of the hearing on Tuesday, [click here](#).

[Safe Building Code Incentive Act: State by State »](#)

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