

House subcommittee hearing on the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program

July 29, 2014

A subcommittee of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee met on July 29 to review the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP). Committee members and witnesses agreed that reauthorization for NEHRP, which expired in 2009, is critical. Witnesses explained that NEHRP would be more effective if it was authorized, not just implied through appropriations, and emphasized that although earthquakes are inevitable, their effects are not.

Ranking Member Daniel Lipinski (D-IL) inquired about the involvement of social science in earthquake preparation and response. Roy Wright from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) explained that the biggest weakness in earthquake mitigation is the public's poor understanding of risk and belief that bad things won't happen to them.

Many members of the committee asked how the United States compares to countries like Japan and New Zealand in earthquake preparedness. Witnesses explained that most American building codes are similar to these other countries, but that there are many old buildings in the United States that could be destroyed in a similar fashion to the destruction of Christchurch, New Zealand, in the 2011 earthquake.

Rep. Chris Collins (R-NY) spoke in support of an earthquake early warning system. David Applegate from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) agreed and elaborated that there were very few fatalities from the actual Tōhoku earthquake that took place off the coast of Japan in 2011 because an earthquake early warning system was in effect. Dr. Applegate noted that there are plans for implementing an earthquake early warning system for the West Coast of the United States.

Sources: House Science, Space, and Technology Committee
