

House subcommittee holds oversight hearing on volcanic hazards

November 19, 2014

On November 19, the House Natural Resources Committee Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee held an oversight hearing on U.S. preparedness for and response to volcanic hazards. The hearing was particularly timely because of the ongoing Kilauea eruption in Hawaii that threatens the town of Pahoa and has already claimed one house. Multiple witnesses and Members of Congress present had ties to Hawaii, including Darryl Oliviera, the director of Hawaii County Civil Defense, Gordon Ito, the Hawaii State Insurance Commissioner, and Representatives Colleen Hanabusa (D-HI), and Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI).

Witnesses testified to the importance of the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Volcanic Hazards Program (VHP) for monitoring hazardous volcanoes and responding to eruptions. However, Charles Mandeville, the VHP program coordinator, emphasized the high cost of these activities relative to its budget; only 30 percent of hazardous volcanoes are currently monitored, and at current funding levels, it could take 20 years to complete the monitoring network.

Witnesses also addressed the role of other federal agencies, particularly the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), in responding to active eruptions. In Pahoa's case, federal assistance has helped efforts to protect infrastructure and maintain road access for citizens, as well as ensured access to education and healthcare services. The panel agreed on the importance of the federal government's participation in these efforts, because state and local agencies would likely not be able to fulfill these functions on their own.

Source: House Committee on Natural Resources
