

THE HILL

Rep. Doris Matsui: Italian accident shows need for 'greater regulation' of cruise lines

By Keith Laing

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The sponsor of a bill passed by Congress last year to improve the safety of passengers onboard cruise ships said Tuesday that an accident off the coast of Italy that has killed 11 people shows lawmakers need to regulate the industry even further.

Rep. Doris Matsui (D-Calif.), who sponsored the Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act that was signed last year by President Obama, said the measure was only the first step in reigning an "highly unregulated cruise line industry.

"The Costa Concordia tragedy underlines the critical need for greater regulation of the cruise line industry," she said in a statement released by her office Tuesday. "The Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act of 2010 made great strides in putting forth both physical and reporting requirements to protect cruise ship passengers from danger, and ensure that crimes are reported in a timely manner.

"While this was a major step forward in oversight of the highly unregulated cruise line industry, the incident in Italy shows that still more must be done to protect passengers," she continued.

Matsui said during the debate over the 2010 cruise line bill that she introduced the measure because one of her constituents was sexually assaulted during a cruise. The law focuses more

on the behavior of passengers aboard ships than the vessels themselves, requiring cruise lines to provide video surveillance to monitor for crime and provide medical personnel on board to deal with the possibility of sexual assaults.

The law also required cruise ships to be fitted with peep holes in passenger's rooms and side rails that were at least 42 inches high.

The measure does not address the responsibilities of cruise ship captains when accidents occur. The captain of the Costa Concordia, which was carrying 3,200 passengers and 1,000 crew members when it crashed near Italy, reportedly abandoned the damaged ship.

Matsui pledged to "continue working with my colleagues to see that there is greater regulation of, and accountability for, the cruise industry, so that a tragedy like this does not occur again."