

THE HILL

Democratic lawmaker wants Congress to expand cruise safety review

By Keith Laing

January 26, 2012

The sponsor of a bill passed by Congress last year to increase the safety of cruise ship passengers said Tuesday that lawmakers should also review the implementation of the 2010 law in a hearing scheduled in the wake of the Costa Concordia accident in Italy.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee said last week that it would examine the circumstances surrounding the crash of Costa Concordia, which Italian officials said hit a reef off the coast of Isola del Giglio and turned on its side after it started to take on water.

But Rep. Doris Matsui (D-Calif.), who sponsored the Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act, said the committee should also take a look at how her bill was being implemented. "I commend the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for calling a hearing to review cruise safety in light of the recent Italian Costa Concordia cruise ship tragedy," Matsui wrote in a letter Tuesday to Transportation Committee Chairman John Mica (R-Fla.) and the ranking Democrat on the panel, Rep. Nick Rahall (D-W.Va.).

"This incident highlights the need to more closely examine policies and regulations relating to the cruise industry," she continued. "To this end, I respectfully request that the scope of this hearing be broadened to include testimony and a status report on the Coast Guard's implementation of the Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act of 2010.

The Cruise Vessel Security and Safety Act, which was approved and signed by President Obama in 2010, focuses mostly on passenger behavior. It requires cruise lines to provide video surveillance and provide medical personnel on board to deal with the possibility of sexual assaults.

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

However, the measure does not address the responsibilities of cruise ship captains when accidents occur. The captain of the Costa Concordia, which Italian officials have said was carrying 3,200 passengers and 1,000 crew members when it crashed, is being prosecuted for abandoning the damaged ship.

Eleven passengers have been confirmed to have died in the crash, and Italian officials have said more than 20 passengers are missing.