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**Congresswoman Matsui Introduces Legislation to Allow Homeowners in a Flood Zone to Rebuild Following a Catastrophe**

*Legislation would create waiver process to allow homeowners in a FEMA Special Flood Hazard Area, like Natomas, to rebuild without elevation requirements, flood insurance rate hikes*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**— Today, Congresswoman Doris Matsui (D-CA) introduced legislation to help homeowners who live in FEMA Special Flood Hazard Areas and whose homes have sustained major damage from a fire or other unforeseen event to rebuild their homes. The Fire Damaged Home Rebuilding Act of 2012 would amend the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 to require FEMA to create a waiver process to consider on a case-by-case basis allowing these homeowners to rebuild their homes without elevation requirements, while ensuring their flood insurance costs remained the same as their neighbors.

“Homeowners who have played by the rules but have had the tragic misfortune of having their homes burn down should have the ability to rebuild with the fabric of their neighborhood intact,” said Congresswoman Matsui. “This is a common-sense issue and must be rectified so that these homeowners can move forward, rebuild their homes, and return to a sense of normalcy.”

As more and more communities across the nation are remapped into Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA), FEMA-imposed building restrictions are implemented. These restrictions apply to both new development and families trying to repair their homes after sustaining major damage. FEMA rules prohibit the issuing of building permits for improvements to homes that cost greater than 50 percent of the home’s market value prior to the damage.

The rules have left a number of homeowners, including a small number in Sacramento, unable to rebuild their fire-damaged homes because the cost to repair a home is often more than the actual structure is worth, and far above the 50 percent threshold. In order to get a permit to rebuild, homeowners are forced to elevate their structure which often is not practical given the cost or community design.

“We bought our home 14 years ago, because FEMA had certified the levees as 100-year flood protection,” said Jennifer Taylor, a homeowner in Sacramento whose house burned down and is unable to rebuild due to the FEMA rules. “We’ve always paid our mortgage on time, had more than adequate homeowner’s insurance, and purchased flood insurance. It is not financially feasible to require victims of home damage to demolish what remains of their home and elevate the entire home if they want to repair it.”

Under this legislation, FEMA would be required to review homeowners’ situations on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration criteria including: the history and frequency of flooding in the area, the cost to the homeowner of elevating the structure to bring it into compliance, whether elevating is feasible given the surrounding community, and whether granting a variance would help avoid blight in the neighborhood caused by the presence of a burned down home. If a variance was deemed appropriate, the homeowner would be allowed to rebuild without elevating.

“Creating a waiver process to the FEMA regulations is a simple and necessary step that will bring immense relief to these homeowners. At the end of the day this is about fairness, FEMA should be able to take a case by case approach to homeowners that have suffered fire damage. If their neighborhood has not flooded in decades or would not fit a substantially elevated home, and the cost is prohibitive, then a variance to their rules is warranted. Homeowners in this situation should be able to rebuild their homes without paying more for flood insurance, and this common-sense legislation would allow this to happen,” added Congresswoman Matsui.

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