

Press Release

Building Experts and Government Officials Will Discuss Opportunities for Mitigating Natural Disasters through Design and Construction at ENR Conference on March 2-3 in Washington, D.C.

New York, NY – February 11, 2011 – Although natural disasters can be unpredictable and devastating, there are concrete steps communities, governments and the construction industry can take to reduce future human and financial loss. One of these opportunities, offers Oregon Congressman **Earl Blumenauer**, is to strengthen the partnership between the Federal government and local communities. “With the majority of Americans at risk for some type of natural hazard,” says Blumenauer, “planning for and mitigating against disasters should be a key focus for policymakers at all levels of government. If we are strategic about how and where we build, hazardous events don’t have to be devastating disasters.” Blumenauer is a keynote speaker at Engineering News-Record’s (ENR) upcoming [Mitigating Disaster through Design & Construction](#) conference, taking place March 2-3 in Washington, D.C.

At the conference, many distinguished speakers will share insights on the latest policies, practices and strategies that aim to make a real difference before the next disaster. One of those speakers, **Julie Rochman**, CEO and president, Institute for Business & Home Safety, commends the “organizations and thought leaders focused on the critical issue of built environment durability. Everyone wins when the design and construction of structures are improved to include resistance to natural hazards,” she says. “The tangible results include more resilient communities, lives saved, jobs preserved and created, and lower disaster response and recovery costs for the public and private sectors.”

This past decade, U.S. insured catastrophic losses totaled \$139 billion, a 56% increase over the 1990s amount of \$89 billion, according to the [Designing for Disaster](#) white paper published by the [National Building Museum](#), an event partner together with [McGraw-Hill Construction/ENR](#) and the [American Society of Civil Engineers](#). Hurricane Katrina alone resulted in \$45.3 billion in insured losses.

“After every major U.S. hurricane, we are shown spectacular images of collapsed buildings,” says **Spencer Rogers**, coastal construction and erosion specialist, North Carolina Sea Grant Program, who will speak on a panel about building codes. “Although it is important that we learn from those failures, it is equally important that we pay attention to the buildings that you do not see, often just outside the picture, which survived the same conditions with minimal damage.”

American Planning Association researcher **James Schwab**, who is also speaking on the building codes panel, offers, “For regions that share common hazards, it is definitely beneficial to standardize battle-tested, disaster-resistant building codes. At the same time, both mitigation and disaster recovery involve a number of complex questions that are often specific to particular areas and environmental circumstances. We cannot ‘cookie-cutter’ our way into resilience; rather, we need to build the capacity in local government to properly assess the hazards that exist—and then act on those findings.”

For communities devastated by natural disasters, it can be challenging to find the opportunities amidst the crisis. Conference attendees will also hear from experts such as **M. John Plodinec** of the Community & Regional Resilience Institute, who encourages people to build back better. “Unfortunately, there are many barriers to doing this well,” he says. “We need to begin to break these barriers down, or at least begin to build the legal ladders to climb over them.” Plodinec’s fellow panelist **Joan Woodward**, EVP for public policy at Travelers, agrees. “By facilitating discussions among policymakers and industry leaders, we aim to raise awareness of better building practices,” she says. “We encourage owners, builders and building officials to adopt disaster resistant standards.”

Looking toward the future, **Najib Abboud**, principal and chief technology officer at Weidlinger Associates, sees technology as an essential tool for the construction industry. “We must use technology to better assess and extend the life of our existing infrastructure, rather than hope for its wholesale replacement,” he says. “Engineers design structures for hazards as they know them today. But the reality is that our hazard landscape is dynamic—the climate is warming, sea levels are rising, security threats are morphing, etc.—all while our critical infrastructure is aging beyond its intended design life.”

For more insights, register for the conference at <http://construction.com/events/2011/mitigatingdisaster>. Discounts are available to AIA, APA, ASCE, CARRI, ICC, NBM, NIBS, SMPS and USGBC members. To request a press pass, call 1-800-371-3238. The event qualifies for 6.5 professional development hours. Mitigating Disaster is produced by Engineering News-Record, the construction industry’s leading provider of multimedia news and analysis. Event partners include the American Society of Civil Engineers and the National Building Museum. The silver sponsor is Bentley. Supporting sponsors include the American Institute of Architects, American Planning Association, Architectural Engineering Institute, Community & Regional Resilience Institute, Construction Institute, International Code Council, National Institute of Building Sciences, Society for Marketing Professional Services, U.S. Green Building Council and the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

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