

Disaster Preparation and Emergency Management

Because our region faces a host of potential threats to our homes and our lives from earthquakes, flooding, mudslides, fire and acts of terror, disaster preparedness is an issue of utmost importance. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita demonstrated the weaknesses that exist within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and we need to learn from their shameful mistakes to ensure we are better prepared for the next disaster that our country faces, either natural or manmade.

In this Section:

- FEMA
- FEMA Mitigation Grants
- Levee Construction and Maintenance

Additional resources:

- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- Department of Homeland Security
- Emergency Preparedness Toolkit

FEMA

The unprecedented national tragedy of Hurricane Katrina revealed the failures within our national disaster preparedness and response plan and we need to learn from these mistakes.

To that end, Rep. Eshoo supports removing FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security, restoring it as a fully independent agency. She also supports requiring the FEMA Administrator to be an emergency management professional reporting directly to the President. Former FEMA Director Michael D. Brown demonstrated the dangers of having an agency head who lacks knowledge of the agency mission and the professional wherewithal to lead it.

[Return to Top](#)

FEMA Mitigation Grants

FEMA mitigation grants were created to give citizens a way to prepare for future disasters, thereby minimizing the damage they cause. These grants have proved to be extremely successful, saving millions of dollars in post-disaster funding as well as lives lost to natural disasters.

On June 28th of 2004, the IRS ruled that funds received through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Flood Mitigation Assistance Program, Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program and the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program must be included as gross income and are, therefore, subject to tax. Funds received through these programs are used for relocation, retrofitting property, foundation elevation, and other means to minimize future damages. This ruling blindsided many citizens across the country who participated in this program only to find out later the taxes they owed on these grants could force them out of the homes they invested in.

Not only was this decision contrary to the intent of these grant programs, but the delay in notifying affected taxpayers caused considerable alarm. Rep. Eshoo met personally with IRS Commissioner Everson to urge him to provide temporary relief while Congress worked toward a legislative solution. Unfortunately, Commissioner Everson was unable to reverse this decision administratively.

Rep. Eshoo cosponsored legislation that ultimately overturned this ruling, clarifying that these grants were not to be considered as income for tax purposes. This legislation was signed into law prior to the tax deadline, saving thousands of grant recipients from outrageous tax liability.

These mitigation grants have proven their worth many times over, most recently when the San Lorenzo River overflowed in January 2006. Residents who had participated in the mitigation program escaped substantial damage and have credited these grants as the reason.

[Return to Top](#)

Levee Construction and Maintenance

More work needs to be done to bolster the Sacramento and Bay Delta levees to prevent a catastrophic breach. A serious earthquake and levee failure would cause massive flooding, kill thousands, and jeopardize drinking water for 23 million people.

In the wake of the Hurricane Katrina disaster, Rep. Eshoo joined several of her California colleagues in sending a letter to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development to support funding for this effort. Although not all the funding was provided, Rep. Eshoo and her Colleagues were able to secure \$40 million for this important work.

Rep. Eshoo also helped secure funding for an Army Corps of Engineers study of the South San Francisco Bay Shoreline. This study is critical not only for the restoration of tidal marshes within the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge, but is also vital for the protection of the surrounding communities from a breach of the levees formerly maintained by Cargill, Inc. as part of its salt production operation.

Rep. Eshoo worked with officials in East Palo Alto and San Mateo County to secure funding to repair a damaged levee in East Palo Alto. Permanent repairs to the levee, which protects East Palo Alto from the San Francisquito Creek and the San Francisco Bay, were completed in May 2007. Rep. Eshoo is continuing to work to secure federal funding for the Army Corps of Engineers for a flood plan that will provide a solution to permanently protect all communities along San Francisquito Creek.

2006 Winter and Spring Storms

The series of storms that struck Northern California beginning in late December 2005 through April 2006 caused extensive damage to parts of the 14th Congressional District and prompted San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties to declare disasters and to seek assistance from the state and federal government. This included the closure of Highway 1 following a landslide south of Devil's Slide. Rep. Eshoo worked with leaders of all the affected communities to respond to this devastating closure. In Half Moon Bay, Rep. Eshoo worked to provide Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, and in August 2006, Highway 1 was reopened ahead of schedule.

[Return to Top](#)