



Firefighters United for Safety, Ethics, and Ecology

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Congressman Mark Udall
ATTN: Stan Sloss
U.S. House of Representatives
100 Cannon, Washington D.C.

Dear Congressman Udall,

May 12, 2008

On behalf of our members and the fire management community in general, we would like to thank you for being the lead House sponsor of H.R. 5218, the Fire-Safe Communities Act. As you know, the problem of new developments spreading into fire-prone wildlands, and existing homes and communities that are poorly designed, built, or maintained to survive wildland fires, is one of the most critical challenges facing fire managers today.

Homes and communities need to get off the “disaster treadmill” of FEMA allowing individuals to build the same homes in the same places in the same ways that are vulnerable to wildfire destruction. Right now there are new homes being constructed in the ashen footprint of last year’s wildfires in southern California! H.R. 5218 provides some valuable incentives for getting private homeowners and rural communities to adopt zoning rules and building codes that will enable homes to become more fire-safe and fire wise. The added benefit of H.R. 5218 is that it will allow individual homes and communities to be prepared for *all* fires, including planned prescribed burns and wildland fire use fires, as well as unplanned wildfires.

The federal agencies have changed their policy in March to make all fires subject to the “Appropriate Management Response” (AMR). This will dissolve many of the distinctions between wildfire suppression and wildland fire use, causing more fires to become larger in size and longer in duration in order to maximize fuels reduction and ecosystem restoration benefits of fire. The presence of fire-vulnerable intermix homes and interface communities is one of the biggest impediments to fire managers taking fullest advantage of the new AMR policy to improve firefighter safety, reduce suppression costs, and avoid resource damage from traditional firefighting operations. H.R. 5218 would do much to remove this impediment to AMR, and promote genuinely fire-safe communities.

Although we do not support “urban sprawl” into fire-prone wildlands, new homes and suburbs are going up every day, and these must be located, designed, and built with wildland fire safety foremost in mind. Unlike other vexing fire problems like climate change and the spread of flammable invasive weeds, the problem of “WUI-land” wildfire disasters is entirely preventable with technical solutions. We can create fire-compatible communities that are designed and built to dwell safely and sustainably in fire-permeable landscapes, and H.R. 5218 takes a big first step towards helping us to become a more fire-adapted society.

Among the many fire-related bills offered in the current Congress, we are very excited about the Fire-Safe Communities Act because it is forward-thinking and addresses a real problem by offering a proactive solution. We are grateful that you are the lead sponsor for this legislation in the House. Please let us know what FUSEE members can do to help gain co-sponsors and pass your bill.

Thank you very much,

Timothy Ingalsbee, Ph.D.
Executive Director, FUSEE

Jay Lininger
Legislative Director, FUSEE