

November 16, 2007: Sanchez Introduces Bill to Authorize Urban Search and Rescue Response System

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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and Rescue Response System

WASHINGTON, DC- This week, Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-California), Vice Chair of the Committee on Homeland Security introduced H.R. 4183, a bill to authorize the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System. This legislation will provide Taskforce personnel or their families with Federal injury, illness, disability, and death benefits if the Taskforce member is injured during a Federal deployment. In addition, this bill provides employment protections so that Taskforce members will not lose their jobs because they have been deployed by FEMA. HR 4183 also authorizes 52 million dollars annually to ensure that agencies that sponsor Urban Search and Rescue Taskforces have the funds they need to operate and without being forced to absorb Federal funding shortfalls.

Currently the Urban Search and Rescue Response System is made up of 28 Taskforces that are sponsored by local or state agencies. Most Taskforces consist of 70 personnel that are ready to deploy within 6 hours of activation, for 10 day deployments with 24 hour operations. The Taskforces deploy with all the equipment they need and they are self sufficient for 72 hours. Taskforces have been deployed to respond to a variety of emergencies including earthquakes, hurricanes, and terrorism events. Past deployments have included the Oklahoma City bombing, 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina among many others.

"Our first responders do a tremendous job in protecting the public and bravely responding to catastrophes," said Sanchez. This additional investment is needed to support our local agencies in ensuring that Urban Search and Rescue Taskforces are well equipped properly trained, and ready to respond as needed.

"The National Urban Search and Rescue Taskforces are valuable resources and excellent examples of how local, state and federal governments can cooperate to effectively prepare for and respond to all-hazard emergencies."

The Orange County Fire Authority sponsors the fifth California Urban Search and Rescue Taskforce. The Orange County Fire Authority and the other sponsoring agencies have made significant commitments to their Taskforces by absorbing Federal funding shortfalls, maintaining the necessary equipment, and supporting their personnel's participation in training, exercises, pre-staging and deployments.

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