



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

**Opening Statement of
Chairman Doug Lamborn**
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
on Wednesday, November 19, 2014
1334 Longworth House Office Building

Oversight hearing on: *"Volcano Hazards: Exploring the National Preparation and Response Strategy."*

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

This is the third hearing this committee has held on geologic hazards this year.

In March we held a hearing on the fiftieth anniversary of the Good Friday Great Alaska Earthquake to look at advances in earthquake science over the ensuing half century. And in June we held a hearing on the status of developing an Earthquake Early Warning System for the U.S.

At this hearing we will examine the National Volcanic Hazards program at the USGS and the development of the preparation and response strategy.

This is particularly timely as all American's have been watching the devastation of a slow moving lava flow on the Hawaiian community of Pahoa. This particular flow began in June and has damaged roads, partially covered a cemetery and burned down two structures.

Interestingly, Hawaiians have asked for emergency help in building an emergency access road which has been delayed over a comment period over concerns of invasive species and a possible endangered species.

The Kilauea Volcano has been in an almost continuous eruption for 31 years. According to the USGS lava output from the volcano averages five cubic meters per second enough lava to fill 200 Olympic-sized swimming pools every day. Fortunately most of the flows have been within Hawaii Volcanoes National Park or on the State of Hawaii Natural Area Reserve Lands and more recently impacting subdivisions adjacent to the federal and state park lands.

Hawaii is not the only state impacted by volcanos, just last week Mount Pavlof on the Alaska Peninsula began erupting and Saturday it shot a plume of corrosive volcanic ash 30,000 ft. into the air – ash that can be seriously harmful to aircraft and as we have seen in Iceland the 2010 eruption sent an ash plume across Western Europe grounding all air traffic disrupting world-wide travel and costing the world economy billions of dollars in lost economic activity.

In the Pacific Northwest the Cascade Range has several active volcanos; Mount Saint Helens has erupted twice in recent history in spectacular display in 1980 and again in 2008.

I would be remiss if I did not bring up the 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines – where USGS scientists predicted there would be a major eruption and developed a warning system to alert people to evacuate areas that could be impacted by the eruption.

U.S. Military personnel and equipment were evacuated from Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay, and while 2.1 million people and 346 communities were impacted by the eruption fewer than a thousand people were killed. An amazing achievement when you consider that Mount Pinatubo was the second largest terrestrial eruption in the 20th century and had worldwide impacts for two years following the eruption.

USGS monitors and assesses the Nation's volcanic hazards and works with other countries to do the same. However, while USGS administers this burden, this is a program that has for too long gone unauthorized by Congress. As has been stated before, as the authorizing Committee in Congress the oversight we hold here today will help us understand and review the programs operating at USGS and clarify what steps can be taken to improve the operations through formal Congressional Authorization in the future.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today and I look forward to hearing their thoughts on The Volcanic Hazards Program at the USGS.