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LARSON COSPONSORS BILL TO ESTABLISH NEW DISASTER INVESTIGATION AUTHORITY IN RESPONSE TO WTC COLLAPSE

National Construction Safety Team Act Introduced in the House

WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today joined the effort to establish a clear protocol to govern all future investigations and management of major building disasters in response to the uncoordinated, inefficient investigation following the collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11. Larson joined his colleagues in introducing the National Construction Safety Team Act in the House which will grant the National Institute of Science and Technology (NIST) new authority similar to that of the National Transportation Safety Board, to lead and coordinate investigations following major building disasters.

Larson stated: "This legislation establishes a new authority to manage and investigate major building disasters to ensure that the mistakes and missteps that have interfered with the examination of the collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11 do not occur again. In the aftermath of the collapse of the buildings, there was no clear authority or effective protocol to conduct the massive investigation required. Steel beams from the buildings that could have provided much needed clues were taken and recycled before investigators could examine them, and information critical to any inquiry such as blueprints, design drawings, and maintenance records

were not obtained until months afterward. The many roadblocks that kept the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) from conducting an effective investigation will no doubt leave many questions about the collapse of the World Trade Center unanswered.

"This bill will ensure that there is one authority in charge of all future building disasters, any investigation will begin almost immediately, evidence and the site of the disaster will be preserved, rescue efforts will not be interrupted, and a clear mandate for the investigation teams will be determined. It will also save lives by improving safety measures that will be determined through the investigations," said Larson.

The problems with the investigation into the collapse of the World Trade Center was the subject of a March 6 meeting of the House Science Committee and led to today's legislation.

The following is a complete outline of the bill:

The National Construction Safety Team Act gives responsibility to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to dispatch teams of experts within 48 hours after major building disasters.

- The legislation gives the teams a clear mandate to:
 - Establish the likely technical cause of building failures;
 - Evaluate procedures used for evacuation and emergency response;
 - Recommend specific changes to building codes, standards and practices; in addition, recommend changes in how emergency response and evacuation procedure
- Make final recommendations within 90 days of completing an investigation.

- The bill gives NIST - through its teams - comprehensive investigative authority, similar to that of the National Transportation Safety Board, to:
 - Access the site of a building disaster;
 - Subpoena evidence;
 - Access key pieces of evidence such as records and documents; and,
 - Move and preserve evidence.

- The bill ensures that the investigations will not impede existing search and rescue efforts.

- The bill establishes clear lines of communication to ensure that the public will be informed throughout the investigation by:
 - Requiring teams to hold regular briefings on the status of the investigative proceedings and findings; and,
 - o Allowing the Director of NIST to convene a public hearing to take testimony relevant to the investigation.

- The legislation creates a standing advisory committee to oversee the implementation of the Act and evaluate the duties of the teams.

- The bill also gives NIST comprehensive authority to complete the investigation of the WTC disaster.