

Volcano monitoring system bill resurfaces

Dylan Brown, Environment & Energy Publishing, 2-14-16

Senators from states in the shadows of dangerous volcanoes yesterday renewed the fight to bolster the nation's fractured and underfunded volcano monitoring system.

Sens. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) and Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) introduced [S. 346](#) to create the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System.

Roughly half of the nation's 169 volcanoes could endanger people and property due to lava flows, toxic gases and mudslide risks. Towering ash plumes from others threaten to clog aircraft engines in flight paths traversed by hundreds of thousands of people every day.

The U.S. Geological Survey has spent more than a decade trying to create a national alert system to minimize death and damage from volcanic eruptions, but stagnant funding still leaves 31 of the highest-risk volcanoes without proper monitoring.

But previous renditions of the "National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring Program Act" have floated around Capitol Hill for years without success.

The bill would unify the five volcano observatories that USGS operates with help from states and universities. It would also establish a national volcano data center overseen by USGS alongside a new office to watch every active volcano in the United States and its territories around the clock.

USGS would be tasked with drafting a five-year management plan upgrading its existing network and installing new networks using state-of-the-art seismometers, satellite and spectrometry.

The bill carves out all the funding "necessary to carry out" the plan until 2027, separate from existing USGS hazard funding.

Murkowski, chairwoman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said last month's unexpected eruptions at Bogoslof volcano in Alaska's Aleutian Islands drove home the need for her bill.

"The Alaska Volcano Observatory was once again instrumental in determining whether this was a public health hazard, and a national system would help supplement AVO's efforts to monitor the impacts of volcanic activity," she said.

The Cascades Volcano Observatory monitors the string of active volcanoes in the Pacific Northwest.

"My bill seeks to ensure we have the science and technology needed to help keep communities safe," said Cantwell, ranking member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Hirono touted the grant program created by the bill to foster "critical monitoring research and technology development that will be used to save lives."

The Hawaiian Volcano Observatory tracks the 34-years-running eruption at Kilauea that as recently as 2014 forced evacuations.

USGS also operates the Yellowstone and California volcano observatories.