

The logo for SMARTERSAFER.org is displayed in white text on a blue background. The text "SMARTERSAFER.org" is in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below it, the tagline "Americans for Smart Natural Catastrophe Policy" is written in a smaller, lighter font. The background of the logo features a blurred image of green leaves against a blue sky.

Americans for Smart Natural Catastrophe Policy

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We understand that as part of your efforts to stabilize the economy, the Administration is considering a program to encourage property owners to make their homes energy efficient. The “cash for caulkers” initiative would provide matching funds to homeowners to weatherize their homes.

According to media reports, this effort would focus on creating green jobs, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and lowering energy costs for homeowners. To advance similar policy interests and to maximize the return on investment of the funds deployed in any program of this nature, we urge you to include measures focused on protecting against natural disasters under both the “cash for caulkers” initiative and the traditional weatherization program.

A holistically designed weatherization program would not only enhance energy efficiency but would ensure that homes are able to withstand disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and other natural events. Adding energy efficient features to homes in harm’s way without making a commensurate effort to protect those homes undermines the public policy goals of weatherization and wastes taxpayer funds.

Including mitigation measures in the “cash for caulkers” initiative will help protect property, save lives and reduce losses after disaster strikes. In the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Ike, millions of dollars have been spent on helping those impacted by these storms rebuild their homes. Effective mitigation measures would protect more homes from future climate events and pave the way for quicker recovery. Strengthening homes is true weatherization because it enables them to withstand weather events.

Mitigation not only saves lives and property, but it is cost effective. For every \$1 spent strengthening property to withstand disaster, \$4 is saved in clean-up, recovery, and rebuilding costs.

We urge you to make mitigation an allowable expense in both new initiatives and existing ones like the weatherization program. Audits of homes should include a review of disaster resiliency and recommend mitigation measures in addition to energy-savings recommendations. In many cases, we believe that only slight modifications would need to be made to include mitigation in existing programs. For example, if new windows are being installed to reduce the loss of heat and air, in hurricane-prone areas, those windows should be able to withstand hurricane force winds.

Existing “shovel ready” programs, managed both by state and local governments and by a range of not-for-profit organizations, provide a range of alternatives to ensure the funds can be invested rapidly and effectively. For example, Florida’s My Safe Florida Home program has a proven track record of administering a mitigation program, improving the safety of thousands of Floridians and generating jobs for contractors, inspectors and others. Unfortunately, this program’s funding was cut in 2009 by the current state administration.

We look forward to working with you to strengthen the economy through making housing stronger, smarter and safer.

Sincerely,

SmarterSafer.org