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## SPIE supports bill to ensure crucial rare-earth elements supply for optics and photonics innovation

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BELLINGHAM, Washington, USA -- Proposed legislation aimed at securing a reliable supply of materials essential to the optics and photonics industry has received support from SPIE, the international society for optics and photonics.

SPIE CEO Eugene Arthurs declared the Society's backing for the Rare Earths Supply Chain Technology and Resources Transformation (RESTART) Act of 2011 introduced this week by Rep. Mike Coffman (R-Colorado) and co-sponsors. The bill, HR 1388, would reestablish a domestic rare-earth industry in the United States.

"Efforts to secure a reliable supply of the rare-earth elements (REEs) and other critical materials are necessary to sustain optics and photonics manufacturing in the U.S.," said SPIE CEO Eugene Arthurs. "In doing so, RESTART will support domestic innovation in this vital sector of the economy."

The legislation addresses SPIE concerns about supply restrictions that would raise prices to prohibitive levels or disrupt production operations for U.S.-based manufacturers, Arthurs said.

Coffman said his bill responds to "the urgent need for us to act to correct our rare-earth supply-chain vulnerability." China, which supplies about 95 percent of the world's rare-earth metals, plans to cut exports of the metals by 35 percent in the first half of 2011. The bill would expedite permitting for new REE exploration, without waiving environmental laws. It establishes a rare-earth inventory to oversee domestic markets and sourcing, and sets up a USGS rare-earth program.

"Fifteen of the seventeen REEs are important to the optics and photonics industry, which supplies components used in millions of products and enables much of today's innovation," Arthurs said. "Access to lasers, which have broad-reaching application in precision manufacturing, in surgery and in guidance systems, availability of optical glass used in everything from cameras to optical sensors, and the supply of phosphors used in LED lighting will all be reduced if this problem is not addressed. The unpredictability of the supply chain threatens manufacturing jobs.

"REEs are also essential for new energy technologies and defense technologies," Arthurs said. "Recent supply disruptions and the current lack of U.S. sources of these materials now pose a strategic threat to our economic and national security."

SPIE also supports establishment of a Rare Earth Policy Task Force within the Department of the Interior as called for in RESTART.

"The task force will accelerate approval and completion of RRE projects, as well as increase investment in, exploration for, and development of domestic rare earth materials." Arthurs said. "SPIE supports a temporary program for rare-earth materials revitalization, as specified in HR 1388. This would stimulate new production and focus on loan guarantees related to the National Defense Stockpile, but not commercial subsidies."

SPIE also supports other RRE initiatives in Congress, including those focused on the environmental impact of such efforts and similar assessment of the global supply chain for RREs. One Senate initiative involves the U.S. Geological Service and the U.S. Department of Energy.

During the last session of Congress, SPIE supported the bipartisan Rare Earths and Critical Materials Revitalization Act of 2010 (HR 6160), which passed the House

Read the [full text of HR 1388](#).

Read articles on the issue:

[Wall St. Cheat Sheet](#)

[Barron's](#)

[U.S. Magnet Materials Association](#)

[SPIE](#), the international society for optics and photonics, was founded in 1955 to advance light-based technologies. Serving more than 180,000 constituents from 168 countries, the Society advances emerging technologies through interdisciplinary information exchange, continuing education, publications, patent precedent and career and professional growth. SPIE annually organizes and sponsors approximately 25 major technical forums, exhibitions and education programs in North America, Europe, Asia and the South Pacific, and supports scholarships, grants and other education programs around the world.

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