

House Resolution 1141

By: Representatives Spencer of the 180th, Corbett of the 174th, Jones of the 167th, Atwood of the 179th, Wilkinson of the 52nd, and others

A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring the victims of the 1971 Woodbine Thiokol Chemical Corporation explosion; and
2 for other purposes.

3 WHEREAS, the Woodbine Thiokol Chemical Corporation purchased a 7,400-acre site in
4 Camden County, Georgia, in 1962, because of its available labor supply, proximity to Cape
5 Canaveral, Florida, immediate deep-water access to the intracoastal waterway, community
6 attitude, and rail and highway transportation systems; and

7 WHEREAS, a production plant composed of 36 buildings was constructed with the intent
8 of developing and manufacturing large solid-fuel rocket motors, but in 1965, NASA officials
9 decided against the use of solid-fuel rockets for the Apollo program, so the plant was
10 transformed into a munitions production plant; and

11 WHEREAS, in December, 1969, the Woodbine Thiokol Chemical Corporation obtained a
12 contract with the United States Army to manufacture trip flares for the Vietnam War, and
13 with this contract, the number of people employed at the plant grew to 500; and

14 WHEREAS, building M-132 was designated to hold the assembly line for the trip flares, and
15 60 employees were working in that building on February 3, 1971, when the building
16 tragically exploded; and

17 WHEREAS, the main cause of the tragedy was the improper classification of an explosive
18 material, which was categorized as a Class-2 hazard when it should have been identified and
19 handled as a Class-7 explosive; and

20 WHEREAS, as a result of the tragic explosion, 29 workers lost their lives and 50 employees
21 were injured, some sustaining injuries that left them permanently disabled; and

22 WHEREAS, after the explosion, the surrounding community was quick to provide assistance
23 to the wounded workers and their families, and when all was said and done, the Georgia
24 Cities of Alma, Brunswick, Darien, Folkston, Jesup, Savannah, Kingsland, St. Marys, and
25 Woodbine, and the Florida Cities of Jacksonville, Fernandina Beach, and Yulee, responded
26 to the emergency; and

27 WHEREAS, the Woodbine Thiokol Chemical Corporation employees rebuilt the destroyed
28 building within a year after the explosion, and they continued to manufacture munitions until
29 the end of the Vietnam War; and

30 WHEREAS, Camden County, the State of Georgia, and the United States are more prepared
31 for emergencies as a result of the Woodbine Thiokol Chemical Corporation explosion; after
32 the explosion, I-95 was completed, surrounding cities were supplied with more fire
33 departments and ambulances, a new Emergency Response Center was built, OSHA enacted
34 new plant safety guidelines, and the Justice Department rewrote mass tort litigation; and

35 WHEREAS, it is abundantly fitting and proper that the victims of this tragedy be recognized
36 and remembered and that gratitude be expressed to those who provided assistance in the
37 aftermath of the explosion.

38 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES that
39 the members of this body honor the victims of the 1971 Woodbine Thiokol Chemical
40 Corporation explosion and commend the people of the Alma, Brunswick, Darien, Folkston,
41 Jesup, Savannah, Kingsland, St. Marys, Woodbine, Jacksonville, Fernadina Beach, and
42 Yulee communities who provided aid and assistance to the victims of this tragedy.

43 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized
44 and directed to make appropriate copies of this resolution available for distribution to the
45 public and the press.