



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

Opening Statement

**Ranking Member Haley Stevens (D-MI)  
of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology**

Research and Technology Subcommittee Hearing:  
*From Risk to Resilience: Reauthorizing the Earthquake and Windstorm Hazards Reduction Programs*

January 30, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Collins, for holding today's hearing to examine two very important programs in our country's preparedness for natural hazards: the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program, or NWIRP, and the National Earthquake Hazard Reduction Program, or NEHRP. I would also like to welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses.

No state or territory of our nation is untouched by natural hazards, be it tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding, wildland fires, and more. We've seen over and over the destruction that they can cause. Last summer, an EF-2 tornado—with wind speeds over 100 mph—hit Ingham and Livingston County near my district, tragically killing 2 people and causing \$75 million in damages. Hazards are an inevitability, but disasters are not. We must continue to push our hazards research, awareness, and preparedness to save lives, protect property, and recover quickly.

I know this is an all-hands-on-deck kind of problem. We need to understand the science behind these hazards. We need to know how to build our buildings, structures, and communities resiliently. We need to help people prepare and to understand human decision making under risk. And we also need to prepare ourselves for the future, because this trend will only get worse as our changing climate results in more frequent extreme weather events.

While earthquakes and windstorms are two very different types of natural disasters, our research and response programs are similarly structured. We pride them in being grounded in sound scientific principles. Since 1977, NEHRP has been a fantastic model for interagency collaboration spanning these missions. Updated building codes protect people, and the agencies' work in functional recovery gets communities back up and running faster after a major earthquake.

Congress created NWIRP in 2004 to build off of NEHRP's successful model. Although the authorizations for NWIRP expired in 2017, the program agencies have continued their important work in windstorm resilience. Improved forecasting and better safety measures, like safe rooms, for tornadoes and hurricanes are absolutely saving lives.

It's not just lives we're saving with these programs, it's also money. We have a lot of older building stock that isn't up to today's codes, especially in rural areas, but a 2019 benefit-cost analysis by the National Institute of Building Sciences found that for every \$1 invested in natural hazard mitigation through retrofitting existing structures, we save an average \$4 in future disaster costs. Investing in resilient communities and hazards research not only saves lives but is fiscally responsible.

Lastly, I want to highlight that in both programs, NIST plays the critical role of leading the interagency coordination. That means taking the research from universities, agencies, and NIST's own investigations, and synthesizing that into standards and recommendations that, when adopted, improve community resilience. Strong coordination makes all the difference in bringing solutions together, and I hope to hear today about NIST's work in catalyzing interagency efforts.

We have come a long way in understanding and preparing for hazards. We know so much more now, and we must continue to help communities prepare for these hazards. As the Science Committee considers the reauthorization of NWIRP and NEHRP, I look forward to hearing from the witnesses on changes to the Programs that can continue to improve our nation's resilience to earthquakes and windstorms.

Thank you. I yield back.