



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

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Haley Stevens (D-MI)
of the Subcommittee on Research and Technology

Subcommittee on Research and Technology &
Subcommittee on Environment Hearing:
*Calm Before the Storm: Reauthorizing the National Windstorm Impact Reduction
Program*

Wednesday, December 4

Good afternoon and welcome to this joint hearing of the Subcommittees on Research and Technology and Environment to review the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program, known as “NWIRP.” Welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses. I look forward to your testimony.

Tornadoes, thunderstorms, hurricanes, and associated flooding are the deadliest and most costly natural hazards in the nation. The National Weather Service reported that in 2018, 75 people lost their lives in wind-related storms and another 80 died in flood-related events. The devastation caused by these storms have become synonymous with their locations and names: the tornadoes of Moore, Oklahoma and Joplin, Missouri, as well as Hurricanes Ike, Katrina, Sandy, Maria, Harvey and so many more.

Every state in the country is exposed to windstorm hazards from one or more storm types, including tornadoes, tropical cyclones, thunderstorms, nor’easters, winter storms, mountain downslope winds, derechos, and others.

Unfortunately, the costs associated with hurricanes are predicted to increase faster than we can pay for them. American families, businesses, and public sector organizations are expected to spend \$54 billion on hurricane damages alone in 2019. However, we have tools and strategies that exist today that could help decrease these overwhelming statistics.

The National Institute of Building Sciences found that communities across the nation could see a 10 to 1 benefit-cost ratio for every investment made to meet common code requirements for wind mitigation.

NWIRP was established in 2004 with three key objectives - improved understanding of windstorms, improved windstorm impact assessment, and reduced windstorm impacts.

Translating our fundamental understanding of wind behavior into reduction of windstorm impact is critical to saving lives and reducing property damage caused by severe windstorms. Understanding human behavior and decision making is also essential to saving lives.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology, NIST, leads NWIRP. The Program also supports interdisciplinary science and engineering research, public education, support for improved building codes, and other activities at the National Science Foundation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

FEMA supports an annual National Preparedness Month each September to promote family and community disaster and emergency planning. In addition to promoting adoption of current building codes, FEMA seeks to educate the general public about measures individuals can take, for example knowing the safest places in their homes to be during a storm.

As climate change continues to increase the prevalence and risks of severe weather, the Federal investments through NWIRP provide us with the necessary tools to save lives and reduce the economic costs of windstorms.

But implementing these tools requires partnership with local governments, the private sector, and individual Americans. Today's discussion will be in part about how we can continue to strengthen those partnerships.

Authorization for NWIRP expired in 2017. The Science Committee looks forward to engaging with the windstorm research and building code communities and State and local governments on recommendations for reauthorization of this important program and improving our nation's resilience to devastating windstorms.