

**Opening Statement of the Honorable John Shimkus**  
**Subcommittee on Environment**  
**Hearing on “Response and Recovery to Environmental Concerns**  
**from the 2017 Hurricane Season”**  
**November 14, 2017**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

The Subcommittee will now come to order.

I want to thank all our witnesses for joining us today. We are especially grateful for those of you who traveled significant distances to be with us today to share your stories about the hurricanes that tore through our country this fall and about the impact of those hurricanes on the environment. We know that many of you are still in the trenches on dealing with the response and recovery efforts, so your willingness to take the time to be here today does not go unnoticed.

This fall, the continental United States and some United States territories in the Caribbean experienced severe weather from five hurricanes, including extensive damage due to landfall from four storms. Hurricane Harvey impacted Texas and Louisiana; Hurricane Irma hit Florida, Georgia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands; Hurricane Maria again hit Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; and Tropical Storm Nate impacted Louisiana and Mississippi.

The Energy and Commerce Committee is conducting a series of hearings to look at the response and recovery efforts conducted during this hurricane season so we can figure out what went well, what we could we have done better, what we need to do going forward. We are also focused on what Congress can do to assist the impacted communities as they work to get back on their feet.

Today we are focused on the environmental impacts of these hurricanes and the response efforts. No two hurricanes are alike and the storm’s

individual characteristics – like the speed, intensity, and amount of precipitation – play a large role in the extent of the storm’s impact on natural resources and the environment. For example, as we will hear from several of our witnesses, Hurricane Harvey may have significantly impacted several superfund sites in Houston because of the record rainfall and flooding.

Likewise, in Puerto Rico, Hurricanes Irma and Maria uncovered and intensified issues associated with aging and inefficient energy infrastructure; contaminated sites that are rapidly multiplying; landfills that are already overflowing; and possibly the most contaminated drinking water supply in the United States. Residents across the island are still without power and a reliable source of drinking water. Many are drinking potentially contaminated water because water purification systems have largely failed in the wake of the storm and in the municipality of Dorado citizens resorted to drinking well water from Superfund sites.

Today, we will look at the response efforts by the Environmental Protection Agency and the States for the impacted communities. We will consider environmental issues in the hurricane-impacted communities such as the availability of clean drinking water, the potential for air releases, the impact on superfund sites and solid and hazardous waste disposal facilities, and risk management and emergency response plans. We hope to hear from the affected EPA Regional Administrators about their efforts – what they accomplished, what remains to be done, and what can be done better in the future and how Congress can assist.

We will also hear from several private-sector witnesses from academia, as well as people who are serving in “boots-on-the ground” roles in Texas and Puerto Rico, and people who can weigh in on what needs to be done regarding the drinking water systems in the affected communities.

Again, I thank all our witnesses for being here. I hope that the discussions we start today – about the response and recovery efforts, the National Response Framework, and about whether statutory or other changes need to be made – will be just the beginning as we continue to oversee and assist the federal and state governments as they carry on the response and recovery efforts for the communities impacted by the hurricanes.

With that, I yield back my time and now yield to my friend from New York, the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Mr. Tonko.