



Opening Statement of Chairman Brian Babin

Full Committee Hearing

Innovation in Disaster Prevention: Advancing Technology for Prediction and Response

Tuesday, September 15, 2026

Welcome to today's hearing, "Innovation in Disaster Prevention: Advancing Technology for Prediction and Response."

I want to thank our witnesses for being here this morning to discuss how emerging technologies can help protect our communities from natural disasters.

This Committee has a long history of examining how science and technology can protect American lives, and few missions are more urgent than helping communities better predict, prepare for, and respond to these events.

Just last year, in my home state of Texas, we experienced catastrophic flooding in the Hill Country that claimed more than 130 innocent lives, including dozens of children.

In the aftermath, Texas invested millions of dollars in new flood-warning infrastructure, including river gauges, outdoor sirens, and a real-time warning system. When flooding struck the region again this summer, county officials reported that the new system performed as intended, and no fatalities occurred.

This is a powerful reminder of what is at stake. When communities have better information and more time to act, technology can help save lives.

Of course, floods are far from the only threat we face. My district has been hit by hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, ice storms, and the occasional wildfire. Across Texas, we also face drought, earthquakes, and even landslides.

Pretty much everything except volcanoes—and thankfully, we don't have to worry much about those.

Fortunately, our ability to understand and respond to these hazards is advancing rapidly.

Artificial intelligence can improve forecasting and help emergency managers make sense of enormous amounts of data. Advanced sensors can monitor changing conditions in real time. Satellites can provide detailed information from areas that may be difficult or dangerous to reach. Autonomous systems can help assess damage and support search-and-rescue operations.

We are well beyond the days when spotting a wildfire meant relying on someone sitting in a fire tower looking for smoke. Today, cameras equipped with machine-learning technology can scan continuously for signs of fire, while satellites can detect and track fires from space. In 2025

alone, ground-based systems detected more than 900 fires before they were reported by the public.

But developing these technologies is only part of the challenge.

A forecast is only useful if emergency managers receive it in time. A warning only works if it reaches the people in harm's way—and gives them information they can understand and act on.

The “last mile” between collecting and analyzing data and getting actionable information to the public remains a weak link in our disaster-response system. Gaps remain in message clarity, geographic precision, connectivity, and the ability to turn warnings into timely protective action.

Today, we will hear directly from experts working to close those gaps. We will examine developments in artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, advanced sensing, commercial satellite capabilities, data analytics, and next-generation communications—and, importantly, what it takes to move promising technology out of the lab and into the hands of emergency managers and first responders.

That means identifying the barriers standing in the way. Lengthy contracting processes, fragmented funding streams, and difficulty integrating new technologies into existing systems can all slow deployment, even when the technology itself is ready.

This Committee has already taken steps to address some of these challenges. Last year, we advanced the Weather Act Reauthorization Act to strengthen weather research and forecasting, expand the use of commercial data, and improve how critical weather and flood alerts reach the public.

And just this summer, we advanced legislation to modernize the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program, including efforts to improve earthquake monitoring, early warning, hazard mapping, and resilience.

We must continue that work by breaking down barriers, supporting critical research, and helping ensure American innovation translates into practical tools that protect lives and property. Today's hearing will help us build on these efforts and identify where emerging technologies can make an even greater difference.

Again, I appreciate our witnesses being here today, and I look forward to your testimony and our discussion.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time.