

**Opening Statement**  
**Committee on Science, Space, and Technology**  
**Joint Hearing – Subcommittee on Technology and Subcommittee on Research**  
*Federal Efforts to Reduce the Impacts of Windstorms*

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Thank you, Chairman Bucshon and Chairman Massie for holding today's hearing to examine federal efforts to reduce the impacts of windstorms.

This is an incredibly important topic. Every year, severe winds from hurricanes, tornadoes, and thunderstorms damage or destroy thousands of homes and businesses, harm vital infrastructure, and, most importantly, threaten human life. An average of 74 Americans have died in tornadoes each year since 1983. My prayers go out to those in Moore, Oklahoma as well as those outside of Oklahoma City, who are currently dealing with this loss. We also cannot forget the more than 1,000 people who lost their lives in Hurricane Katrina.

The extent of property damage and economic losses from windstorms vary widely, but since 2010, economic costs are well over a \$100 billion dollars.

The National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program or N-WIRP has the potential to lessen the loss of life and economic damage by translating research and development on the understanding of windstorms and their impacts into improved building codes and emergency planning.

In order for these efforts to be effective they cannot leave out the most critical component – people. Understanding how people —such as state and local officials, business owners, and individuals —make decisions and respond to storm warnings is essential to designing effective strategies to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a disaster.

A recent survey by the National Center for Disaster Preparedness accurately highlights this need. The survey found that most Americans are unprepared for a major disaster and that they have a false sense of security about what will happen if a major disaster occurs.

Specifically, more than half of the families surveyed had no emergency plan in place for a hurricane or earthquake, and those who had a plan lacked essential items to implement their plan like flashlights and extra batteries. Even more unsettling is that one third of the individuals surveyed believed that calling 911 after a major disaster would bring them help within an hour. This is in stark contrast to reality which shows that emergency responders are overwhelmed after major disasters and communities often have to take care of themselves for several days before help is able to arrive.

I mention this because I think it is important to remember that we can perform all the engineering and natural science research we like, but in the grand scheme of things if we don't have a clear understanding of the human element in disaster mitigation, preparedness, and response then those efforts may be for not.

We only have to look to Moore, Oklahoma for an example. Moore had been hit by an EF5 tornado—the most powerful category—before, back in May 1999. One of the myths about tornadoes is that they will not hit the same city more than once. So when individuals are debating spending the \$2,500 to \$5,000 on a shelter or the \$4,000 to \$12,000 on a safe room, they are doing so thinking that another tornado will not hit and therefore, the extra expense is probably unnecessary. In fact, of the 40 new homes constructed since that May 1999 storm, only 6 of them contained a safe room.

Building disaster resilient communities will take an interdisciplinary approach and that approach must include social science research.