

**Opening Statement**  
**Ranking Member Phil Gingrey (R-GA)**  
**Windstorm Impact Reduction Hearing**  
**Subcommittee on Technology & Innovation**  
**July 24, 2008**

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Good morning Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you for calling this hearing on an issue that unfortunately touches the lives of the American people on an annual basis: damage and economic loss from windstorms. Each year, lives are lost and billions upon billions of dollars are spent recovering from the destruction caused by tornadoes and hurricanes.

When the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Act was passed four years ago, the federal government recognized the need to proactively conduct research and development programs to save lives and reduce property damage caused by these horrific storms. I am looking forward to hearing from today's panel about both the successes of the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program over the past four years, as well as improvements to the program that can be made moving forward.

Mr. Chairman, my home state of Georgia has a long and notorious history with tornadoes and windstorms, with several incidents in the past year and a half alone. In March of 2007, tornadoes struck the towns of Potterville, North Newton, and Americus, leaving nine people dead and tremendous damage in their wakes. In December in Ashburn, a truck driver was killed when a tornado blew his vehicle off the road.

This past March, Downtown Atlanta witnessed incredible damage to infrastructure when tornadoes ripped holes in the roof of the famed Georgia Dome during the 2008 SEC Men's Basketball Tournament. At the same time in my Northwest Georgia district, tornadoes struck Polk and Floyd Counties – causing significant economic loss and regrettably taking the lives of three of my constituents.

In addition to the lives lost, the United States sustains billions of dollars in economic damages each year due to tornadoes and hurricanes, and our vulnerability is only increasing. According to the Georgia Insurance Commissioner, insured losses across the State of Georgia in just the first five months of this year have surpassed \$400 million.

Mr. Chairman, improved windstorm impact reduction measures have the potential to save lives and reduce losses associated with these storms. For instance, the federal government continues to invest in R&D activities that can increase warning time for tornadoes and other extreme weather events. While little can be done to protect structures from large tornadoes, researchers have made significant progress in designing buildings and retrofits to withstand high wind events.

Finding practical and effective applications for this research remains the biggest challenge that the National Windstorm Impact Program has today. This obstacle is unfortunately complicated by the number of stakeholders – federal agencies, state and local communities, and private organizations – that have a role in better preparing the nation against windstorms. The R&D efforts in this program create ways for these stakeholders to collaborate in a productive and effective manner.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the witnesses for coming to relate their expertise on the challenges, and hopefully the successes, of reducing windstorm impacts. This is a complex challenge with clear benefits that will require a great deal of cooperation, patience, and resolve to overcome, and I look forward to supporting these efforts.