



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Emergency Management & Technology Subcommittee Ranking Member Troy Carter (D-LA)

Examining Fire Hazards: Lithium-Ion Batteries and Other Threats to Fire Safety

February 15, 2024

Before I begin my remarks, I want to say that yesterday, while many of us were reflecting on the six years since the Marjory Stoneman Douglas school massacre, another mass shooting took place at the Super Bowl parade. My heart goes out to all those impacted by yesterday's shooting.

These acts of violence are horrific. Next year, my home district will host the Super Bowl. We owe it to our communities, our first responders and *our children* to do more. We have a serious gun violence problem in our country and I hope my colleagues will work together to pass commonsense reforms.

Turning to our hearing, I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. To our first responder witnesses, I want to thank you, in particular, for your ongoing commitment to protecting your communities.

The threat posed by lithium-ion batteries is growing and is one that we should certainly be monitoring. The fires caused by lithium-ion batteries pose a unique challenge, and New York City seems to be ground zero for these types of fires, with over 250 incidents just last year. Last year, while docked in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, a fire broke out on an oil tanker due to the thermal runaway of a cell within a lithium-ion battery in a handheld radio, which caused \$3 million in damage.

My colleague, Congressman Ritchie Torres, has been leading the legislative work on addressing the threats from lithium-ion batteries in the House of Representatives and I want to thank him for his leadership on this issue. I hope that the Energy and Commerce Committee will continue its work on Congressman Torres's bill, the Setting Consumer Standards for Lithium-Ion Batteries Act.

I fully anticipate today's conversation with the panel to mostly be related to lithium-ion batteries, but I hope that we will also focus on the range of fire threats and oversight of programs that support firefighters. One such fire threat is climate change.

Climate change has significantly increased the frequency, intensity, and destructiveness of wildfires. Last week marked six months since the fires on Maui, where 100 people died. While Maui was the deadliest wildfire, we have experienced in modern history, in recent years there have been a string of wildfires that have been deadly and caused mass destruction. Six of the last seven years (2017-2023) have had catastrophic fires which resulted in fatalities, loss of infrastructure, resulted in displacement of thousands of families.

In Louisiana, last year we had an unprecedented wildfire season. In August alone, we had more than 550 fires that destroyed homes and forced several evacuations. As climate change continues to

escalate, urgent action to mitigate its impacts and implement effective wildfire management strategies becomes imperative to safeguard the environment and communities at risk. These wildfires are not happening in a vacuum. They are occurring simultaneously as other disasters and adding strain to Federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local, emergency managers and first responders.

I look forward to speaking to our witnesses today about fire hazards, but also more broadly about the need to prepare our communities against all threats. Our Subcommittee has jurisdiction over the Department of Homeland Security Grant Programs, which also helps first responders prepare their communities against all threats. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses how these various grants help fire departments improve community resilience.

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