

## Congress reauthorizes national earthquake hazards program

November 27, 2018

A bill to reauthorize the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) through fiscal year 2023 passed the House on November 27 and now awaits final approval by the President. The National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program Reauthorization Act of 2018 (S. 1768) serves as a follow-up to the Earthquake Hazards Reduction Act of 1977, which established NEHRP as the nation's interagency platform for seismic hazards.

NEHRP was created to facilitate research, planning, decision-making, and mitigation efforts related to seismic activity between government agencies. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is the lead agency responsible for NEHRP planning and coordination. NIST is joined in their effort by three other government agencies: the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the United States Geological Survey (USGS). FEMA is in charge of earthquake preparedness, response, and public awareness efforts, while NSF supports seismology and geology research and the USGS provides earthquake monitoring and notification services.

The program has been reauthorized ten times since its establishment, most recently in 2004. However, the 2004 reauthorization expired in 2009, leaving NEHRP to operate without authorization for much of the last decade. The lack of authorization has weakened NEHRP's effectiveness including a drop-off in interagency coordination, according to a report on the bill published by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

In addition to reauthorizing the activities of the program and allowing for the appropriation of federal funds, the text of the bill clarifies the role of specific agencies within NEHRP, including reauthorizing NIST as the lead agency. The text explicitly allows the USGS to issue earthquake warnings and create other earthquake awareness products and tasks the USGS to submit to Congress a 5-year management plan for the operation of the Advanced National Seismic System (ANSS), a network of seismic stations that provides real-time information on earthquake activity. The bill also calls for the agencies that comprise NEHRP to complete a comprehensive assessment of the nation's earthquake risk reduction strategy.

Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) introduced S. 1768 on September 6, 2017. Nearly a full year later, Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA-48) introduced H.R. 6650 in the House as a companion to the Senate bill. The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation reported favorably on the Senate version of the bill soon after and it was subsequently passed in the Senate on September 27, 2018. The House has now followed suit two months later to send the bill to the President's desk, where it awaits enactment into law.

*Sources: Library of Congress.*

---