National Construction Safety Team Advisory Committee  
National Institute of Standards and Technology  

March 1, 2013  

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller IV  
Chairman  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510  

Dear Mr. Chairman:  

I am pleased to submit the 2012 Annual Report of the National Construction Safety Team (NCST) Advisory Committee (Committee) of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). The Committee serves as NIST’s advisor on implementation of the NCST Act (P.L. 107-231) and our opinions and recommendations expressed in this letter reflect our views as an independent, private sector body.  

The Committee met face-to-face at NIST in Gaithersburg, Maryland on December 10, 2012. Public comments were invited for this meeting; however, none were received. The Committee also met by teleconference on January 11, 2013, to review the Committee’s draft report. An overarching, unanimous recommendation of the Committee is that Congress continue to fund NIST in its vital role as an impartial provider of factual, science-based information for the codes and standards development process. The Committee urges Congress to consider expanding the scope of NIST for NCST activities to bring changes into society as quickly as possible. Implementing the findings of NCST investigations, past and future, will save lives and reduce property losses. Even modest expansion of the program, consistent with the detailed recommendations summarized below, will have major benefits.  

The Committee’s recommendations rising from the January 11th teleconference are as follows:  

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2. The Committee urges NIST staff to use its communication skills as well as its technical prowess to advise less sophisticated audiences regarding the appropriate use of maximum wind speed and other parameters arising from NIST investigations such as the Joplin tornado. Modeling based on such parameters is central to the interpretation of damage from such investigations and, if used by someone other than NIST investigators, must take into account the inevitable approximations and uncertainties.
3. The Committee urges that data gathering should lead to enhanced public welfare, especially improved life safety and community resilience consistent with that described in the recently published National Research Council report on disaster resilience. Data gathering by National Construction Safety Teams should be expanded to include infrastructure as well as buildings.

4. The Committee recommends that NIST advance the social science element of the Joplin tornado investigation, and of investigations of other events affecting broad geographical areas, such as Superstorm Sandy, to understand how human behavior contributed to the casualties. To the extent that improved self-protective actions would reduce casualties, it is recommended that NIST undertake or become a prime contributor to a program of science-based public information and education.

5. The Committee recommends that more events should be investigated. The decision-making criteria, leading to scoring on a five-point scale, appear to be appropriate. Due to resource limitations, NIST can only investigate a limited number of events. However, valuable data are being lost due to these limitations. In this regard, the Committee strongly endorses NIST’s decision to participate in the FEMA investigation of Superstorm Sandy.

6. The Committee recommends that NIST collect data on fires following all disasters driven by natural events. The National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) is intended to capture fire data but in fact leaves gaps in the data. NIST staff, trained in mass-disaster data collection and armed with simple collection and recording systems that can capture geospatial data, could greatly enhance the usefulness of NFIRS.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Isenberg, Chair
National Construction Safety Team Advisory Committee

Identical letter sent to:
The Honorable John Thune
Ranking Minority Member
March 1, 2013

The Honorable John Thune  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

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Identical letter sent to:
The Honorable John D. Rockefeller IV
Chairman
March 1, 2013

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Science and Space
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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National Construction Safety Team Advisory Committee

Identical letter sent to:
The Honorable Ted Cruz
Ranking Minority Member
March 1, 2013

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Subcommittee on Science and Space  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

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Identical letter sent to:
The Honorable Bill Nelson
Chairman

Sincerely,

Jeremy Isenberg (Chair)
National Construction Safety Team Advisory Committee
March 1, 2013

The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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Jeremy Isenberg, Chair
National Construction Safety Team Advisory Committee

Identical letter sent to:
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Ranking Minority Member
National Construction Safety Team Advisory Committee  
National Institute of Standards and Technology

March 1, 2013

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Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

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Identical letter sent to:
The Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman
March 1, 2013

The Honorable Thomas Massie
Chairman
Subcommittee on Technology
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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The Honorable Frederica Wilson
Ranking Minority Member
March 1, 2013

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Subcommittee on Technology  
Committee on Science, Space and Technology  
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