

NIH DR2 Program: Advancing Disaster Research Across the Country

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Disaster Research Response Program (DR2) makes it easier for communities and researchers to get answers quickly. After a disaster, local leaders need fast, reliable information to protect public health and secure resources. DR2 provides the tools and support researchers need to collect time-sensitive data, which helps communities effectively respond and plan for recovery. Notable DR2 activities include:

COLLECTING DATA TO SUPPORT LONG-TERM HEALTH IN EAST PALESTINE, OHIO



After the 2023 train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, DR2 helped researchers stay engaged well beyond the initial response and recovery phases. Long-term support

ensures the community can understand health risks and plan for recovery.

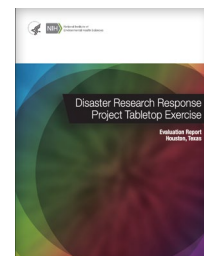
How DR2 makes a difference:

- **Coordinated expert response:** DR2 convened the Environmental Health Sciences (EHS) Network to share community concerns and plan research efforts.
- **Community-driven priorities:** A virtual workshop hosted by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (a DR2 partner), gave residents a voice in shaping research priorities.
- **Fast-tracked funding:** Several researchers received NIEHS Time-Sensitive Research Grants to study health impacts, with additional funding announced in 2025.

DR2 ensures researchers stay connected to East Palestine, respond to real concerns, and deliver science that informs recovery and policy.

CONNECTING RESEARCHERS & RESPONDERS BEFORE DISASTERS STRIKE: THE HOUSTON STORY

To prepare for future disasters, DR2 convenes local leaders, responders, and researchers for training exercises. These trainings pay off when real emergencies happen.



How DR2 makes a difference:

- **Preparedness exercises:** In 2015, DR2 led a tabletop exercise simulating a Category 4 hurricane with local officials, academics, and community members.
- **Real-world impact:** When Hurricane Harvey hit two years later, researchers used DR2 tools and partnerships from the workshop to quickly respond and address health concerns.
- **Lessons that last:** Insights from Hurricane Harvey later guided response efforts during a chemical fire in Deer Park, Texas—as described in this [peer-reviewed journal publication](#).

DR2 proactively trains local networks to ensure they can respond faster and smarter when disasters happen.

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About DR2: Comprehensive Support for Disaster Researchers

For over a decade, DR2 has helped researchers respond quickly and effectively after disasters and emergencies. DR2 makes it easier for them to do their work by providing the tools, connections, and training they need. DR2 supports research that protects public health with:



Ready-to-use tools: We offer surveys and data collection resources through the [DR2 Resources Portal](#), so researchers don't have to start from scratch.



Training and community insights: We provide [education and best practices](#), including input from affected communities.



Funding and partnerships: We connect researchers with [federal funding](#) opportunities and collaborators.



Coordinated response: After disasters, we bring together experts in a [Community of Practice](#) to guide research efforts and improve future preparedness.

IMPROVING WILDFIRE RESPONSE THROUGH ACCURATE DATA COLLECTION



Wildfires pose serious health risks to communities and first responders. DR2 helps researchers collect the right data and share lessons learned to improve future response efforts.

How DR2 makes a difference:

- **Identifying research gaps:** In 2024, DR2 staff published [a scoping review](#) of wildfire exposures and human health, which described available wildfire-related exposure and health data and highlighted critical research gaps.
- **Collaborating after disasters:** Following the 2025 Los Angeles, CA fires, DR2 collaborated with the University of Washington Natural Hazards Reconnaissance Facility (RAPID) and the EHS Network to exchange best practices, research insights, and other wildfire response resources.

DR2 helps researchers understand the health impacts of wildfires, improving how we prepare for and respond to future events.

GIVING RESEARCHERS THE TOOLS TO ACT FAST



Time is critical after a disaster. DR2 provides ready-to-use tools and templates that help researchers quickly launch disaster research studies.

How DR2 makes a difference:

- **Hundreds of resources:** The [DR2 Resources Portal](#) offers over 550 surveys, protocols, and data tools to support disaster research.
- **Faster approvals:** The [DR2 Rapid Acquisition of Pre- and Post-Incident Disaster Data \(RAPIDD\) Protocol](#) helps researcher get quicker Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval with standardized methodologies and instruments.
- **Customizable support:** In 2023, DR2 launched the [RAPIDD Protocol Designer](#)—a virtual tool that lets researchers build tailored protocols for their studies.

DR2 removes barriers and saves time, so researchers can focus on protecting public health when it matters most.

TRIBAL-LED, RESEARCH-INFORMED DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



DR2 works alongside Tribal communities to support disaster planning that reflects their values, priorities, and ways of life. The collaborative approach emphasizes community-

led planning and capacity building.

How DR2 makes a difference:

- **Listening and co-designing:** In 2018, DR2 held a two-day listening session with leaders from 19 tribes in Arizona, which led to a customized tabletop exercise simulating a train derailment and chemical spill—designed with and for Tribal participants.
- **Centering Tribal knowledge:** At a 2023 DR2 workshop in Seattle, WA, the Duwamish Tribe shared perspectives on ecological restoration, cultural connections to the land, and youth-led engagements as a long-term resilience strategy.

DR2 supports Tribal communities with tools and trainings that promote independence, respect sovereignty, and build lasting resilience.

FACILITATING FEDERAL COLLABORATIONS FOR DISASTER RESEARCH

NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Sciences
Engineering
Medicine

Intentional collaborations are critical for limiting

facilitating timely disaster research and response. DR2 helps federal agencies work together more effectively, ensuring disaster science and response are impactful.

How DR2 makes a difference:

- **Annual coordination:** Since 2014, DR2 has hosted yearly meetings with federal partners to share lessons learned and improve disasters research strategies.
- **Expert networks:** DR2 partnered with the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine to establish the Action Collaborative on Disaster Research—a forum for scientists to debate important topics and build the U.S. disaster research enterprise.

DR2 brings federal agencies together to streamline research, share knowledge, and improve how the federal government responds to disasters.

To learn more about the DR2, see the [10th Anniversary Report](#) (March 2025).

Last updated November, 2025