



National Weather Service Discloses Plans to Move away from Local Forecasts – Move to Part Time Offices

(October 21, 2016, Washington D.C.) Instead of filling more than 600 vacancies, the National Weather Service announces plans to eliminate the work of local forecasters and distribute forecasts and guidance produced by a Washington D.C. Center. Local forecasts, prepared with the expertise of local meteorologists, will give way automated forecasts based largely on computer models. The plan will lead to a degradation of service with local weather forecast office hours reduced from the current 24/7/365 schedule to part-time and in some cases, possibly seasonal operations.

The expertise of local forecasters is critical to the NWS mission of saving lives. Each geographic region has its own unique weather patterns. Local forecasters understand these patterns and apply this knowledge to the computer models. Their intimate knowledge of these weather patterns, the geographic region, the flood prone areas, and the demographics of people whose lives they protect are critical to their lifesaving work.

The NWS's new plans would change the role of the local meteorologist from using their expertise and knowledge of local weather patterns to a "weather briefer" who is no longer responsible for the forecast, but instead disseminates information from the Washington Center. The plan also mentions the use of flexible staffing that could include migrant meteorologists who travel to locations based on severe weather needs; a position that negates the value of local expertise, knowledge of unique local weather patterns, and familiarity with the geographic location and flood prone areas.

One of the most critical problems of relying on national center forecasts is the disconnect that would develop between the largely centralized "forecast" and the local weather patterns, cultural, and geographical information that local forecasters provide. Forecasters would be routinely placed in a compromising position of having to choose between a briefing based on an official/centralized forecast with which they disagreed, or briefing based on their own judgment informed by extensive local knowledge. It is the National Weather Service Employees Organization's stand that the ownership of the forecast must be at the final point of delivery.

"When severe weather hits your area, do you want the information coming from someone who lives and works in the community, who understands the unique weather patterns, who has the historical knowledge of how weather impacts the area and flood zones because they work with this data everyday – or would you want your information from a Washington D.C. bureaucracy or even a traveling forecaster shipped in, someone who is learning about the patterns as they commute to your location?" asked NWSEO President Dan Sobien.

Weather experts agree that ownership of the forecast must be at the final point of delivery. The NWS's new ideas are a far contrast from the NWS Modernization in 2000 which stressed the work of local forecasters; the ideas are against the National Academy of Public Administration's recommendations to Congress in 2013, and conflict with the research from the 2012 National Research Council's report, "Weather Services for the Nation: Becoming Second to None" (National Academies Press, 2012) stating, "local knowledge of phenomena, terrain, and infrastructure is an important factor in forecasting, and it needs to be accounted for in any potential regionalization of functions."

The National Weather Service Employees Organization has provided a clear vision of how the NWS should evolve to meet the ever-expanding need for local, regional, and national forecasting, as well as the support services for NWS partners such as emergency managers, local and state government. NWSEO's vision stresses that the NWS must ensure that the provision of accurate, timely, and locally-focused weather forecasts and warnings are maintained at the current high level. These experts know and understand unique local forecasting challenges and the impacts those challenges may have on the safety and lives of people residing in their local communities.

"Removing the local forecaster out of this equation, diminishes the greatest factor in the success of the NWS's lifesaving mission, which is direct service to the taxpayers in the communities in where they live," said NWSEO President Dan Sobien. "Unfortunately, nature never does what a computer model wants it to do. The centralized forecast plan is putting lives at risk."

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