



## **NWS Director's Actions Speak Louder than Words**

(December 22, 2011) One week after tweeting the importance of sending weather warnings through mobile devices, Assistant Administrator for the National Weather Service Director Dr. Jack Hayes says he's ready to pull the plug on NWS efforts to create wireless weather warning apps.

Dr. Hayes attended a conference for Weather Ready Nation on December 13. Discussions focused on the importance of sending weather warnings through mobile devices such as cell phones and tablets, the tools most people are now using. Dr. Hayes tweeted the following from the conference, "JackatNWS Cell phones and geotargeted alert information named most important warning dissemination technology by panelists so far."

Today, Dr. Hayes, is in support of abandoning all NWS efforts to develop those types of weather warning applications. On December 21, Laura Furgione, Deputy Director of the National Weather Service, distributed a message calling for a hold on use of any NWS resources, including on-duty time of NWS employees, to develop such applications.

"The irony in this is that our director is using social media to promote the importance of disseminating warnings through wireless devices, yet, he is abandoning the NWS work to create such apps," said NWSEO President Dan Sobien. "It's clear this is where people are most likely to receive their warnings, yet NWS has no interest in pursuing the best way to alert them when it comes time to protect their lives and property. The whole episode makes me question the agency's commitment to a Weather Ready Nation."

NWSEO is ardently fighting this policy. A Four Winds was distributed to members yesterday and the NWSEO Facebook page received more than 50 responses to the Four Winds post. Most of the responses focused on the importance of using the talents and expertise of the NWS workforce to find the newest methods to better disseminate weather warnings. Members are encouraged to join the NWSEO Facebook group. If you have a Facebook account, you can join by searching for National Weather Service Employees Organization on Facebook and request admission. Once your membership is verified, you will be granted admission to this closed group.

### **One member detailed his concerns:**

The decision set forth by NWS management concerning mobile application development boggles my mind, and adds to the confusion I have concerning policies and methodologies within the NWS. Although unfamiliar with the specifics and logistics of management (perhaps there is a legal detail I'm missing), it feels to me that NWS as a whole is moving at a snail's pace in the 21st century.

Not wanting to recap, but in a review of government websites we were slotted the #2 spot of worst government websites. A year later there has been some consistency amongst WFOs in tailoring webpages (not the case with ERH), but overall each WFO page is different in its resources and outreach built upon a HTML template that screams the early 2000's. I am sure we are all aware how our customers have difficulty in finding information (especially climate

related) on NWS websites, trying to muddle through the poor navigation, and wonder why one WFO has an awesome product, whereas another WFO doesn't (the same applies when offices have the same product, but different color curves). I am aware that a National Team, led by Curtis Carey, is addressing a revitalization of NWS webpages. The first examples do not do much more than simply make the website look pretty. The project is pretty foggy, and the release of information and details is pretty slow, so with that being said I am likely unaware of the specifics of the website revitalization. But one thing I do wonder is why we couldn't simply bid out a contract to companies that specialize in developing websites. We're meteorologist, not full-time web developers. I would even go so far in putting forth some of my own money to hire a web development firm to come up with several templates of a new NWS webpage to vote on. Apologies for rambling, I simply feel the outdated NWS HTML template could use a dynamic touch and more user-friendly navigation.

Going along the point of inconsistency, doesn't it feel like there is a loss of communication across the board within the NWS? For example, different WFOs are developing GIS-based applications. There was a point in time a few years ago where I knew of three WFOs developing precipitation mapping via GIS but were unaware of one another's progress and/or development. There is now a CRH wiki focused on GIS applications addressing the issue so as to keep everyone involved with GIS applications on the same page and not duplicate efforts. Yet still I feel a sense that there needs to be a National Wiki and more cross communication between WFOs. What I mean to say is simply a question, is there some means to which all WFOs could integrate thoughts and ideas in a collaborative discussion so as to avoid duplication of applications and spread ideas amongst one another? There is the local applications database (LAD), and WFOs collaborate fairly often with their neighboring WFOs. But, for example, did you know that the Taunton WFO develops their TAFs through GFE, that TAFs are generated automatically by editing wind/wind gust/cig/vsby/sky/llws grids? Knowing that each WFO has a different climate, different customers, different forecast responsibilities does lay down a point that sometimes cross collaboration does not work, but there are still some areas of forecasting that are pretty general across the board (we all forecast similar elements of temperature, sky, wind, etc.).

Focusing back on the reason for writing this email, the policy set forth to stop developing mobile apps I believe is the wrong one. During outreach events, I have been approached by the public concerning if we have a mobile app for the iPhone/Droid. Clearly I understand Ms. Furgione's point about the plethora of apps in the marketplace that use NWS resources, but I feel the public would like to hear it directly from us. It just begs to wonder whether the NWS is all about the protection of life and property. In the NWS Town Hall meeting it was determined that members of the public were overburdened by sirens and numerous amounts of tornado warnings each year throughout Alabama. They resort to personal communication and observation to analyze the threat of weather (TV calls to and from family members). I'm left with a feeling that NWS is about NWR and sirens, older technology, whereas our customers are moving into mobile applications. For example, when contacted by a storm spotter we usually have their home address in our spotter database, but likely they're mobile and we are left with taking their report from their specific location. The point I make is simply the reverse, we, as the NWS, should be meeting our customer needs of mobility. Using GPS within smartphones we could identify a customer's location, determine if they are in any polygons for watch/warning/advisory's, and advise via push notifications of potential threats (some of this is actually in the works). We should also address the issue concerning the clarity of our products so as to reduce the amount of false alarms and convey a level of confidence (though I have heard that the integrated warning team was dissolved).

Just on a side note, over the last few years the NWS has been hand in hand with the FAA, bolstering deals to improve our interaction with aviation customers via TAFs. Although sadly this has led to the deterioration of climate records, and contract weather observers, at long-period

observation sites, the level of dedication and customer service to the aviation interests has improved. I feel this is the direction the NWS should be taking with the general public. If we are to take a roll of DSS into 2020 then we need to be more proactive in clarifying threats to our customers on a mobile basis. Improvement of web-based resources and mobile applications I feel will take us in such a direction, as well as utilizing social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and G+.

I simply feel that the present leaders of the NWS are failing at their responsibilities in progressively moving the NWS forward in meeting customer-specific needs. Many of you have more years in the NWS than I. Perhaps I overstate the obvious in the various points made throughout this email, but I am left feeling as a NWS employee that we are not meeting our mission fully of protecting life and property.