MAY 2 3 2003

Mr. Barry Lee Myers
Executive Vice President
AccuWeather, Inc.
365 Science Park Road
State College, Pennsylvania 16803

Dear Barry:

Thank you for your letter of April 22, 2003, regarding wireless Internet access to National Weather Service (NWS) warnings and forecasts. General Kelly asked me to respond.

Formatting existing NWS products in open, industry-recognized standards is fully consistent with established Federal government information policy and the recommendations of the recent National Research Council (NRC) report "Fair Weather: Effective Partnerships in Weather and Climate Services." The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) and its implementing guidance, OMB Circular No. A-130, "Management of Federal Information Resources," set forth the fundamental obligation of government agencies actively to disseminate taxpayer funded information to the general public. Circular A-130 states:

> Agencies **shall** use electronic media and formats, including public networks...in order to make government information more easily accessible and useful to the public... A basic purpose of the PRA is to "provide for the dissemination of public information on a timely basis, on equitable terms, and in a manner that promotes the utility of the information to the public and makes effective use of information technology." (44 U.S.C. 3501(7)) (emphasis added).

The NRC reviewed applicable law and policy, as well as the NWS mission, and formulated two relevant recommendations which apply broadly to NWS products and services:

> Recommendation 4. The NWS should continue to carry out activities that are essential to its mission of protecting life and property and enhancing the national economy, including collecting data; ensuring their quality; issuing forecasts, warnings, and advisories; and providing unrestricted access to publicly funded observations, analyses, model results, forecasts, and related information products in a timely manner and at the lowest possible cost to all users.

Recommendation 5. The NWS should make its data and products available in Internet-accessible digital form. Information held in digital databases should be based on widely recognized standards, formats, and metadata descriptions to ensure that the data from different observing platforms, databases, and models can be integrated and used by all interested parties in the weather and climate enterprise.

In short, making existing NWS warnings and forecasts available in a widely accepted open protocol is fully consistent with established Federal information policy, the NWS mission of protecting life and property, and the recommendations of the NRC. An industry group, the Open Mobile Alliance, sponsors Wireless Applications Protocol (WAP) and describes the protocol as "the de facto worldwide standard for providing Internet communications and advanced telephony services on digital mobile phones, pagers, personal digital assistants and other wireless terminals." We have automatically formatted existing NWS text products into WAP and made these products available on two of our web sites — the Miami Weather Forecast Office (WFO) and the National Hurricane Center (NHC) — for use by all. These web sites make it clear existing NWS warnings and forecasts in WAP format are only available through private sector service providers, e.g., quoting from the Miami web site:

WFO Miami text products (Zone forecasts and Coastal Waters forecasts) in both English and Spanish are now available through some Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) enabled cellphones and Portable Digital Assistants (PDA).

To view the Wireless WFO Miami home page, you will need a cellphone or PDA equipped with a WAP browser and an account with a wireless ISP. Contact a cellphone or wireless PDA service provider for more information.

WFO Miami and NHC are merely making available to private sector wireless Internet providers existing NWS products that have been formatted to display on devices that use WAP.

This early trial of wireless Internet gives NWS valuable experience. The Office of Management and Budget is leading an initiative, called "SAFECOM," to provide interoperable wireless solutions for Federal, state and local public safety organizations to ensure that they can share information as they respond. The NWS is helping define requirements for this government-wide initiative with other government agencies and industry. As NWS upgrades existing computer systems, the ability to automatically format data between open formats like HTML, XML,
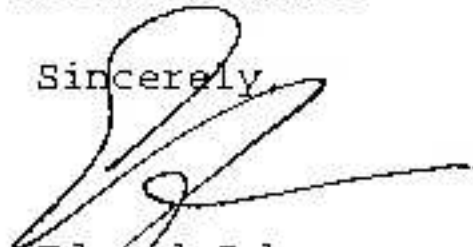
WAP and others are already built into the commercial off-the-shelf applications that come with the computer upgrades. NWS is developing plans for these upgrades and for our participation in "SAFECOM," and will follow the principles of the "Fair Weather" report in seeking comment on these plans.

You have taken my statement to the NRC Committee out of context. As I stated, NWS is not investing in new infrastructure to take advantage of wireless services provided by the private sector. My statement to the NRC was intended to contrast the highly successful NOAA Weather Radio system, which requires significant investment of appropriated funds to directly disseminate warnings and forecasts to the public, with emerging private sector wireless Internet providers which will disseminate these same warnings and forecasts to subscribers without significant investment of taxpayer money on infrastructure which is being built by the private sector. NWS does nothing more than automatically format its existing information in an open and widely accepted Internet standard, leaving it to the private sector to distribute that information to their subscribers as they see fit - a stellar example of the public-private partnership in action.

In the spirit of the "Fair Weather" report, we are soliciting public comments on this new wireless Internet capability. Your letter will be forwarded to the product manager of both the WFO Miami and NHC web sites to include among the other comments received. We will carefully consider all comments before making any decisions regarding continuing or changing this capability.

Your letter asks us to halt this activity. Particularly with the upcoming hurricane season, it would be irresponsible for NWS to terminate these services without regard to the comments of others and deprive wireless Internet users of the ability to access NWS information critical to their lives and well being. As President George W. Bush has said, "With preparation, forecasting, and coordination, we can save lives and improve our Nation's ability to withstand the impact of hurricanes."

Sincerely,

Edward Johnson
Director, Strategic Planning
and Policy

cc: Max Mayfield
    Rusty Pfost