

Significant Event Reporting

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1. Overview. When a significant hydrometeorological or NWS-related event occurs, the Office of Climate, Water, and Weather Services (OCWWS) Watch Office will provide a timely report to senior National Weather Service (NWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Department of Commerce (DOC) personnel so they can respond to inquiries from the White House, Congress, media, and other interested parties. These reports also help determine whether a service assessment and/or NWS support to an interagency Post-Storm Data Acquisition (PSDA) activity should be undertaken.

2. Notification Process. During normal business hours, the regions or the National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP) Service Centers should notify the OCWWS Watch Office immediately following the event with a “For the Record” e-mail message according to procedures outlined in the Hydrometeorology Duty Officer Manual (HDOM). During non-business hours email messages should reach the OCWWS Watch Office by 8a.m. Eastern time the following business day. For significant events with the potential of widespread media attention, notify the OCWWS Watch Office immediately following the event according to procedures outlined in the HDOM. The OCWWS Watch Office will pass information on to senior officials as outlined in the HDOM. Notification of NOAA and DOC officials, whether written or verbal, will be at the direction of the Assistant Administrator (AA) for Weather Services.

3. Content and Dissemination of Reports.

3.1 Hydrometeorology Duty Officer Manual (HDOM). The HDOM contains detailed information and current procedures that field offices, regional offices, and NCEP will follow to

report significant events to OCWWS. It contains the specialized procedures to report information, such as tropical weather status and Washington, DC, winter weather warnings to NOAA and DOC. The HDOM contains focal point contacts and telephone numbers of key personnel and offices. The HDOM is password protected on the Internet and maintained by the OCWWS Awareness Branch. It is updated as necessary.

3.2 Weather Service Headquarters (WSH) Reports to NOAA. Once the regions or NCEP apprise OCWWS of a significant event, OCWWS (Watch Office) will notify, as appropriate, NWS and NOAA personnel as outlined in the HDOM. Notification should include the appropriate program manager, the AA for Weather Services, and NOAA Public Affairs (PA). The AA for Weather Services will, at his discretion, contact the NOAA Administrator.

For events with multiple deaths, numerous serious injuries, extensive property damage or media attention beyond the local area, the OCWWS Watch Office will prepare a short narrative describing the event in memorandum format from the AA for Weather Services to the NOAA Administrator. Memoranda can also be anticipatory, i.e., issued prior to an imminent event. For events occurring during office hours, OCWWS Watch Office personnel will write a memorandum as soon as possible following OCWWS notification. For events occurring during non-office hours, the Watch Office will draft a memorandum, based on regional headquarters and NCEP input, for the AA for Weather Services signature by 9 a.m. Eastern time on the business day following the event.

a. Content of Significant Event Reports. The memorandum to the NOAA Administrator, see Example 1, should be no more than one page in length and should include the following:

Event. Describe the event's nature, including the date, time, and location in reference to well known landmarks.

Impacts. Describe the event's consequences, including deaths, injuries, damage, and service disruption (e.g., power outages, transportation problems, etc.).

NWS Operations. Identify NWS offices involved. Highlight NWS services including outlooks, watches, warnings, and forecasts. Provide an indication of lead time(s), as well as how NWS services heightened the public's perception of risk and improved response. Lead times will refer only to the official lead time (the difference between the time the warning was issued to when the event first occurred in the county warned). Note any problems associated with staffing, equipment performance, dissemination, and impacts to NWS personnel or facilities.

Other Facts. Note response actions from emergency managers and local decision makers. Describe media response and any positive or negative comments from local officials. If a service assessment team or PSDA team is being fielded, note the status of the activity.

Example 1: Significant Hydrometeorological Event.

MEMORANDUM FOR: (Name)
Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere

FROM: (Name)
Assistant Administrator
for Weather Services

SUBJECT: Spencer, South Dakota, Tornado - Saturday, May 30, 1998

Event

A tornado struck the small community of Spencer, South Dakota (McCook County), around 9:44 p.m. EDT on Saturday, May 30, 1998. Spencer is located about 35 miles west-northwest of Sioux Falls. Population is about 300.

Impacts

Six people died and 150 were injured. Ninety percent of the town was destroyed.

NWS Operations

The Storm Prediction Center issued tornado watch #468 valid from 5:30 p.m. until 11 p.m. EDT. This watch included McCook County; lead time over 4 hours. The NWS office in Sioux Falls issued a tornado warning at 9:32 p.m. EDT. Lead time to the event was 12 minutes. The warning mentioned a tornado west of Spencer.

Other Facts

Sirens did not sound because of loss of electricity. An NWS team, in coordination with the Office of the Federal Coordinator for Meteorological Services and Supporting Research (OFCM) and the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), conducted an aerial survey of the tornado track on Sunday. Another aerial survey will be conducted today from Spencer east along the path of the most destructive winds in order to learn when the storm went from being tornadic to a severe thunderstorm with extreme straight-line winds.

A service assessment team is being formed to evaluate NWS performance.

b. Anticipatory Reports. Based on input from regional offices and/or NCEP service centers, the OCWWS Watch Office will prepare a memorandum to notify NOAA of expected significant hydrometeorological events, or ongoing events. The memorandum should describe the event's nature, its expected impact, and planned NWS operations. Disseminate the memorandum as soon as possible during normal business hours.

Some examples include a high risk of severe weather included in the convective outlook anywhere in the United States, and significant severe or winter weather expected in the Washington, DC, area. Press releases or updates on subjects, such as drought or El Nino, may be

the subject of memos. If the regions are aware of an event that may cause significant media interest, the Watch Office should be notified.

c. Dissemination of Significant Reports. After internal coordination within OCWWS, the OCWWS Director will forward the memorandum to the AA for Weather Services. The memorandum will be faxed to the following:

- NOAA Administrator (Under Secretary);
- NOAA Assistant Administrator;
- NOAA Deputy Under Secretary;
- NOAA Executive Secretariat;
- NOAA Public and Constituent Affairs;
- NOAA Office of Legislative Affairs (LA);
- DOC Office of Deputy Secretary;
- DOC Chief of Staff.

The OCWWS Watch Office sends copies of these memorandum to an e-mail list of NWS senior managers and program staff.

3.3 Regional Headquarters Reports to WSH. As soon as regional personnel are aware of a significant event, they will notify OCWWS according to procedures outlined in the HDOM. This notification includes a written report outlined in Example 2. These reports are the basis for the memoranda sent to the NOAA Administrator as outlined in section 3.2.

a. Contents of Regional Reports. These reports should be succinct (see Examples 2 and 3) and should outline all of the information required for the preparation of memoranda for the NOAA Administrator. If no watches or warnings were issued, and the event did not meet the criteria for issuing watches or warnings, note it in the appropriate section.

Example 2: Content and Format for Regional For the Record Memoranda on Significant Hydrometeorological or NWS Related Events.

DATE

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM: WFO/RFC/NCEP Center/Regional Office - preparer's Name

SUBJECT: Significant/Severe Weather, Flood Event Location, Date

EVENT: Brief entries describing the event and time of occurrence

LOCATION: Town/City, County, State

OFFICES: WFO/RFC/NCEP Center _____

DEATHS: Number (age and gender if known)

INJURIES: Number and seriousness if known

DAMAGE: Extent, dollar amount (identify source of information)

OUTLOOKS: Type, issue and valid times, including fire weather outlooks, if appropriate

WATCHES: Type, issue and valid times

WARNINGS: Type, issue and official lead time (time between issue time and first report of severe weather, winter flooding, flooding, etc. in affected county)

SERVICE: Towns in path of storm mentioned in warnings and statements, follow-up statements, observations of services rendered during the event. Note any information about NOAA Weather Radio (NWR) performance (e.g., automated or human voice), Use of Emergency Alert System, and other dissemination methods.

SYSTEMS: Note any equipment problems; when applicable, highlight significant benefits of the following systems:
WSR-88D
Satellite
AWIPS
NWR

USER RESPONSE: If known, identify community responses, emergency management actions taken, and media coverage.

Disclaimer:

Any information listed pertaining to these events and/or lead times associated with watches and warnings are based on the best information available at the time this preliminary report was prepared. Subsequently, these data may be changed as time permits a more thorough investigation of the circumstances surrounding this event.

Example 3: Regional For the Record Memorandum for a Significant Hydrometeorological Event.

May 11, 1998

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Record

FROM: W/ER1x1 - Richard G. Watling
W/ER1x5 - Kathy Hoxsie

SUBJECT: Tornado in South Carolina

LOCATION: Dorchester and Berkeley Counties in South Carolina

EVENT: A tornado touched down in Dorchester County, SC, then moved southeast into Berkeley County, from just after 5 to 5:10 p.m. EDT on May 10, 1998. The tornado lifted just after crossing into Berkeley County around 5:10 p.m.

OFFICES: Charleston, SC (CHS)

DEATHS: One 90-year-old female in Summerville, Dorchester/Berkeley County, SC, around 5:10 p.m. EDT (mobile home). The death occurred in a subdivision on the Berkeley side of the line.

INJURIES: At least ten in Dorchester/Berkeley County, SC, from around 5 to 5:10 p.m. EDT.

DAMAGE: Five homes destroyed; around 100 structures damaged in Dorchester/Berkeley County.

OUTLOOKS: Severe weather highlighted in severe weather outlooks issued both by the Storm Prediction Center and WFO Charleston at 5 a.m. EDT.

WATCHES: Tornado watch #327 valid for coastal, Midland, and Piedmont, South Carolina, for 5/10/98 from 1:39 p.m. to 9 p.m. EDT.

WARNINGS: Several Tornado warnings issued:
Dorchester County, SC, valid 4:39-5:25 p.m.; lead time: 22 minutes.
Berkeley County, SC, valid 5-6 p.m.; lead time: 10 minutes.

SERVICE: Warnings mentioned towns in storm's path, including Summerville. Summerville is a suburban area that straddles the Dorchester/Berkeley County line.

EQUIPMENT: Warnings were all radar based using strong gate-to-gate shear signatures. No equipment problems occurred during the event.
(WSR-88D, AWIPS, Satellite, etc.)

USER RESPONSE: Television stations preempted normal programming during event.

b. Dissemination. The regions should notify the OCWWS Watch Office immediately of more crucial significant events as described above in section 2. Following procedures in the HDOM, send written reports to the e-mail list provided by OCWWS. For events occurring during normal business hours, send reports as soon as possible after the receipt of the information. For events occurring outside normal business hours, the regions will send their regional reports to the Watch Office or call to provide critical information verbally by 8 a.m. Eastern time the following business day to allow the Watch Office time to prepare its memorandum for the NOAA Administrator by 9 a.m.

3.4 Weather Service Field Offices Reports. Reports of significant hydrometeorological and NWS related events may originate from field offices but should be routed to their regional office. All field offices should follow the guidance provided by their regional office to ensure that OCWWS has the information it requires in a timely manner.

3.5 NCEP Service Center Reports. When appropriate, NCEP Service Centers will prepare reports similar to regional headquarters' reports highlighting their products and services and send them to OCWWS. Specific guidance is provided in the HDOM.

APPENDIX A - Glossary of Terms

Significant Hydrometeorological Events - Significant hydrometeorological events are those that directly result in at least one fatality, numerous injuries requiring hospitalization, extensive property damage, or widespread media interest. However, heat episodes with fewer than 5 fatalities and multiple lightning fatalities fewer than 3 are not considered significant hydrometeorological events.

Significant NWS-related Events - NWS-related significant events include, but are not limited to, situations where there are one or more employee fatalities or injuries occurring in the line of duty; major damage to an NWS facility; civil disturbances affecting NWS employees or installations; results of terrorist acts requiring provision of weather services; toxic spills or nuclear incidents requiring the provision of hydrometeorological services; wild fires, tsunamis, avalanches, and volcanic eruptions, requiring the provision of services from the NWS; and weather-related marine and aviation accidents as defined in Directive 10-20, Forensic Services.