

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE INSTRUCTION 10-1803

October 14, 2010

Operations and Services

SERVICE OUTREACH AND FEEDBACK

NOTICE: This publication is available at: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/directives/>.

OPR: OS51 (R. Gird)

Certified by: OS5 (C. Woods)

Type of Issuance: Routine

SUMMARY OF REVISIONS: This instruction supersedes NWS Instruction 10-1803, “Service Outreach and Feedback”, dated October 1, 2002. Changes include:

- (1) Added Service Coordination Hydrologists (SCH) throughout the document;
- (2) Added the word “engagement” in sections 2 and 3.1 to identify the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources involved in outreach and education;
- (3) Replaced the word “customers” with “partners and other users” throughout the document to be consistent with 10-18, Service Outreach, and the new policy specified by the General Counsel for Weather Services (GCW);
- (4) Renamed the heading in section 2.1 with “Outreach Guidelines”;
- (5) Expanded on section 2.1 to include details and references for the role of service hydrologists and service coordination hydrologists;
- (6) Revised section 3.1 to include information on the Integrated Database for Education and Awareness (IDEA) website located on the NWS Performance Management website;
- (7) Added details in section 3.2 regarding how partner and user feedback is used to also design and create new products and services;
- (8) Added details in section 3.2.1 regarding procedures for surveys ;
- (9) Changed title from to Service Outreach and Feedback; and
- (10) Revised format of document to be consistent with instruction template and appropriate use of acronyms.

signed

09/30/10

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Director, Office of Climate,
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Date

Service Outreach and Feedback

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1. Objective. The objectives of outreach and feedback are to assess partner and other user’s needs, build user and partner knowledge of our services and products, increase awareness and preparedness, and utilize user and partner feedback to improve services and products.

2. Overview. National Weather Service (NWS) employees participate in service improvement activities including outreach, engagement, and feedback. The NWS Strategic Plan states that it is a user-oriented, performance-based organization. Reaching out to our partners and other users and partners helps us develop the services and products our citizens expect.

2.1. Outreach Guidelines. Warning Coordination Meteorologists (WCM), service hydrologists, and Service Coordination Hydrologists (SCH) are the primary NWS service representatives to partners and other users. They are knowledgeable about all NWS service programs for their area and lead their office’s service outreach activities. The role of Service hydrologists is described in NWS Instruction 10-921, Weather Forecast Office Hydrologic Operations and the role of Service Coordination Hydrologists is described in NWS Instruction 10-911, River Forecast Center Operations. In Weather Service Headquarters, each Office of Climate, Water, Weather Services (OCWWS) service division and service branch has an individual responsible for national service outreach for their service programs.

3. Conducting Effective Outreach and Feedback Activities. Yearly service outreach activities should include NOAA and NWS strategic outreach themes, goals in the NWS Strategic Plan, regional and local service goals, and awareness and preparedness information.

3.1. User and Partner Education. Where possible, user and partner outreach and engagement activities should target trade groups, diverse community organizations, and professional societies to maximize the number of people contacted. Many of these organizations have newsletters or other communication mechanisms to disseminate our information. NWS should upload their best practices to the Integrated Database for Education and Awareness (IDEA) website located on the NWS Performance Management website. NWS offices should also draft articles for the OCWWS *Aware Report*. The *Aware Report* highlights NWS services and individual office best practices. Send articles for the *Aware Report* to the OCWWS Awareness Branch. Encourage partners to draft articles for the *Aware Report* illustrating how they work with us and use our information. NOAA/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) joint training courses are excellent tools for educating emergency managers about our products and services, and awareness and preparedness information. Field offices should use these courses to train our partners and other users who can then go out and conduct further training activities. Needs for additional courses and changes to the present courses should be communicated to the OCWWS Awareness Branch.

3.2. User and Partner Feedback. Feedback from our partners and other users and partners regarding our products and services is critical. It enables the NWS to constantly improve our services/products, respond to changing needs of our partners and other users, design and create new products and services, and to regularly evaluate our effectiveness. An excellent time to gather information on our services is following significant events. Any meetings with emergency managers, local officials, the media, and other partners should be scheduled at the convenience of the partners. There are federal government limitations on how we can obtain feedback. Reference Appendix A, User and Other Surveys, for more details.

3.2.1. The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) The PRA requires that all Federal agencies get clearance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) before surveying partners and other users or collecting information from the public. The statute defines "collection of information" broadly. It covers any identical questions posed to ten or more members of the public--whether voluntary or mandatory, whether written, electronic, or oral.

Items that are covered under the PRA include: partners and other user surveys; Web surveys; federal surveys sent to state, territorial, local, and tribal governments; application forms; and focus groups using predetermined scripts.

Areas exempt from PRA regulations include: employee conferences; complaint systems; suggestion systems; town halls; listening sessions; and other meetings with users (driven by an agenda rather than "questions"). These conversations are either one-on-one or structured so loosely that the questions are not "identical" within the meaning of the PRA. If a field or headquarters office determines that a survey is the best way to acquire the information it needs to provide optimum services, a request will be submitted to the Awareness Branch/Performance and Awareness Division in OCWWS. The OCWWS Awareness Branch will then forward the survey request to appropriate NOAA officials who, if NOAA approval is granted, will submit the request for OMB clearance.

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Appendix A contains additional information about the PRA as well as alternative method for collecting information. Offices are encouraged to make copies of appendix A and have them readily available as a quick reference.

APPENDIX A – User and Other Surveys

The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) generally requires agencies to get OMB clearance before requesting facts or opinions from ten or more persons by the use of standard questions. This holds true regardless of whether the information is gathered by the use of forms, a Web site, phone or personal interviews, and about any other method; regardless of whether responses are mandatory or voluntary; and regardless of whether the agency or a contractor does the actual collecting of information. Clearance is needed when a rule contains an information requirement, regardless of the number of people affected.

There are a few ways you can gather information without needing PRA clearance.

Public Meetings - No clearance is needed if attendees at a public meeting are just asked to comment or give suggestions on the program or subject in question. General discussions and listening sessions about programs and goals present no problem. If, however, the group is gathered for the purpose of having attendees respond to a specific set of formatted questions, then the PRA does apply.

Solicitations for General Comments - No clearance is needed if you offer the public the opportunity to make comments or suggestions, so long as you do not ask specific questions other than self-identification (name, address, e-mail). Many Web sites, for instance, offer a box or e-mail address for people to give comments, and that is not a clearance problem.

If a planned survey is subject to the PRA clearance process, the normal clearance process is lengthy--about five months. Clearances for information requirements in proposed rules actually take less time, about two months. A special fast-track review process is available for certain types of user surveys. Information about these processes can be found at NOAA's PRA Web site at: www.cio.noaa.gov/Policy_Programs/pr.html

Any OMB clearance for an information collection only applies to the specific circumstances described in the clearance request. A survey approved for one office, for instance, cannot be used by other offices without going back to OMB. This restriction even applies to questions in NOAA's "generic" user survey clearance.