



# Aware

*Aware is published by NOAA's National Weather Service to enhance communications between NWS and the Emergency Management Community and other government and Private Sector Partners.*

**February 2014**

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## From the Top

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### Weather-Ready Nation Ambassador Initiative

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[Dr. Louis Uccellini](#), NWS Director

Louis Uccellini,  
NWS  
Director



I am pleased to announce the launch of the [Weather-Ready Nation Ambassador™ \(WRN\) initiative](#). The feedback, ideas and suggestions we received from the national, regional, and local level as well as external partners were invaluable during the development of this new initiative.

The WRN Ambassador initiative is an effort to formally recognize NOAA partners who are improving the nation's readiness against extreme weather, water and climate events. As a WRN Ambassador, organizations commit to working with NOAA and other Ambassadors to strengthen national resilience against extreme weather.

To be officially recognized as a [WRN Ambassador](#), an organization commits to:

- ◆ Promoting WRN messages and themes to its stakeholders
- ◆ Engaging with NOAA personnel on potential collaboration opportunities

- ◆ Sharing their success stories of preparedness and resiliency
- ◆ Serving as an example by educating employees on workplace preparedness

To support the WRN Ambassador initiative NOAA will:

- ◆ Provide WRN outreach content
- ◆ Explore innovative approaches for collaboration with other organizations
- ◆ Assist with StormReady/TsunamiReady opportunities for communities
- ◆ Formally recognize organizations as WRN Ambassadors

Building a Weather-Ready Nation requires more than government alone. We must involve everyone in an effort to move people—and society—to heed warnings, take action, and influence their circles of family, friends and social networks to act appropriately.

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to email the WRN team at [wrn.feedback@noaa.gov](mailto:wrn.feedback@noaa.gov).

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## Dissemination News

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### NWS to Take Part in EAS Live Event Code Tests

[Tim Schott](#), NWS Dissemination Services Meteorologist

NWS is planning to take part in several live code tests for the Emergency Alert System (EAS) in 2014. Often, NWS conducts these tests in conjunction with a national preparedness week or an exercise

coordinated by a state emergency management (EM) office. The state's Association of Broadcasters must submit a waiver request to the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) on behalf of EAS participants to include radio and television broadcasters, cable service providers and key EM agencies, NWS and other partners. The FCC requires receipt of the waiver request well in advance of the planned Live Code Test dates.

If the FCC approves the waiver, NWS and other participants conduct a comprehensive public information campaign to ensure the public is fully informed—and understands—that the Live Code Test is just that, a test.

Many NWS offices add banners to their web pages, air announcements over NOAA Weather Radio, coordinate with key partners and send out a Public Information Statement.

NWS headquarters can arrange teleconferences to ensure a smooth process between regional headquarters and local offices in the months and weeks before the planned test. For further information, contact [Tim Schott](#).

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### Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)

In late 2013, the FCC asked a group of WEA partners to make recommendations to the FCC regarding WEA testing. The group has met several times to discuss options. There are a number of complexities which make this a challenging subject.

Participants in the group include commercial wireless carriers, members of the EM community, NWS, FEMA, FCC and others. Check future edition of *Aware* for updates. For further information on WEA, contact [Mike Gerber](#).

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## Decision Support

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### Using Virtual Operations Support Teams During Extreme Events

[Kerry Jones](#), WCM, NWS Albuquerque, NM; [Rick Smith](#), NWS Norman; [Corey Pieper](#), SRH; [Jeff Phillips](#), EM Los Ranchos, NM; [Scott Spratt](#), WCM, NWS Melbourne, FL

A Virtual Operations Support Team (VOST) is one way for EMs and local NWS offices to help harness the power of social media for EMs and Weather Forecast Office (WFO) operations. A VOST is a group of trusted agents, normally organized and directed by municipal, county, or state emergency management. A VOST can help expand the ability to engage with the public before, during and after emergencies.

The VOST makes use of new communication technologies and social media tools to lend support via the Internet at crucial times. VOSTs are given social media and web-based missions to manage and are specifically asked to find information and disseminate it, to spot social media trends, monitor the public voice and amplify official messages.

This information is then shared with NWS. The volume of information not directed to the NWS about an ongoing event that is available on social media is staggering. The VOST's efforts in distilling some of the most-critical information in real time, and providing that to the NWS has proven very beneficial.

VOSTs are activated by EMs much the way SKYWARN Spotter/Amateur Radio Groups are to perform specific functions in support of affected organizations and jurisdictions.

The idea of and use of the term VOST was coined by EM Coordinator Jeff Phillips of Los Ranchos in Albuquerque, NM, back in March 2011. Since 2011, the VOST concept has



*Tsunami damage at Kodiak, AK, after the 1964 Great Alaska Earthquake and Tsunamis.*

rapidly expanded to include countries outside the United States.

Several WFOs, including Norman, Melbourne and Albuquerque have benefited from the use of VOSTs in the past couple of years. These offices have assisted EMs in setting formal and informal guidelines as well as provided EMs access to private NWChat rooms dedicated to local or regional VOSTs. Key benefits of VOST include:

- ◆ Providing ability to focus on the web and multiple social media platforms during extreme events
- ◆ Introducing a variety of skill sets and an extended network, both professionally and socially
- ◆ Bringing a keen ability to see trends and issues during a weather-related incident or disaster
- ◆ Providing a vital filter for EMs and WFO staff

To find out more, see:

- ◆ [Virtual Operations Support Groups](#)
- ◆ [VOST Training: Pinterest](#)
- ◆ [Social Media and Emergency Management](#)

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### Tsunami Preparedness Week, March 23-29

[Christa Rabenold](#), Mitigation Specialist, NWS Tsunami Program

A tsunami could strike the U.S. coastline at any time. And although a tsunami cannot be prevented, you can mitigate adverse impacts through community preparedness, timely warnings and effective response.

To boost tsunami preparedness efforts in the United States, NOAA, FEMA, and the U.S. Geological Survey in coordination with the [National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program](#) (NTHMP), a partnership among these federal agencies and 29 U.S. states and territories, are promoting and supporting national [Tsunami Preparedness Week](#), March 23-29. During this week, NOAA and its partners will promote safety and awareness and urge coastal residents and visitors to prepare themselves and their families for a tsunami.

This year, Tsunami Preparedness Week will also commemorate the anniversary of the [Great Alaska Earthquake and Tsunamis](#). The magnitude 9.2 earthquake occurred in Alaska's Prince William Sound on

March 27, 1964, and remains the largest recorded earthquake in U.S. history and the second largest in the world.

Valdez, Anchorage and many villages along the Alaska Coast were significantly damaged or destroyed by the earthquake and the tsunamis that followed. More than 130 people died in Alaska, Oregon and California. Damage from the tsunamis alone, which also impacted the U.S. and Canadian west coasts and Hawaii, was estimated at almost \$1 billion (2013 dollars).

In conjunction with Tsunami Preparedness Week, NWS will lead [three tsunami exercises](#):

- ◆ CARIBE WAVE/LANTEX14 (Caribbean/Northwestern Atlantic)
- ◆ LANTEX14 (Gulf of Mexico)
- ◆ PACIFEX14 (Pacific Coast).

These exercises will help to improve the effectiveness of the tsunami warning system. They provide an opportunity for EMs to test operational lines of communications, review tsunami response procedures and promote tsunami preparedness. EMs are invited to take part at varying levels ranging from drills to full-scale exercises. As EMs well know, regular exercising of response plans is a critical preparedness activity.

NOAA also is supporting Alaska Shield 2014, an exercise based on the 1964 event being led by the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. Recognizing the significance of the event and the importance of the exercise, FEMA has incorporated Alaska Shield 2014 into its [Capstone Exercise 2014](#), a complex, national-level emergency preparedness exercise that will bring together federal, state, local, tribal, private sector and other officials and representatives to assess the nation's collective preparedness for large-scale disasters.

The [Tsunami Preparedness Week webpage](#) contains information about activities taking place across the

country to encourage preparedness and commemorate the 1964 event and provides links to tsunami-related preparedness information.

The page is updated regularly as new information becomes available. During Tsunami Preparedness Week, follow NWS on Facebook and Twitter and share the messages with your constituents.

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## Outreach Innovation

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### Radio Brings Weather Readiness Across Borders

*NWS Insider Staff, Silver Spring, MD*

To expand its reach to the local Spanish-speaking community, NWS Brownsville, TX, is collaborating with Radio Esperanza KOIR 88.5-FM and KRIO 97.7-FM/910-AM, a Christian non-profit radio network with extensive coverage in south Texas and northeastern Mexico

Once each month, NWS Forecaster Maria Torres takes the mike in "La Hora Comunitaria" (Community Hour), a Spanish-language interview and call-in program. Torres helps prepare the local Hispanic community for hazardous weather and tells listeners how they can help build a [Weather-Ready Nation](#).

"There are a lot of non-English speakers across the Rio Grande Valley who may not take preparedness seriously," said Torres. "Some do not know the services NWS provides. What better way to share this valuable information than with radio listeners across the Rio Grande Valley and northeast Mexico who cross the border every day."

Torres conducted her first broadcast last November. She explained the NWS structure and functions, and then focused on Texas Winter Weather Awareness Day and how to prepare for hazards, such as freezing temperatures, wind chill and fog.



*NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley Forecaster Maria Torres with Pastor Abiel Ake at the Radio Esperanza studios in Edinburg, TX*

Her second broadcast described NWS field operations and the difference between watches and warnings. Future broadcasts will focus on the new [NOAA Weather Radio](#) Spanish Language transmitters set to debut in 2014.

Radio Esperanza has a large footprint in Mexico, especially at night. Some transmissions reach as far as Guatemala and Honduras, nearly 1000 miles away. The station also has a large and growing social media presence.

In mid-December 2013, more than 25,000 followers were on its [Facebook Page](#).

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### Integrated Warning Team Workshops Seek to Improve Communication

*NWS Insider Staff, Silver Spring, MD*

NWS Fort Worth, TX, led the first of a series of Integrated Warning Teams (IWT) workshops on November 21. The 55 attendees included EMs; media, including radio, TV, and newspaper; amateur radio network controllers and NWS meteorologists.

The workshop identified communication issues among these groups. As part of the workshop, NWS Fort Worth staff presented information on the role of media, and also simulated a severe weather event through

radar/GIS manipulation, followed by a facilitated discussion on the likely actions during the event.

Attendees identified NWSChat as an additional information source. Broadcast meteorologists told NWS Fort Worth staff that the more information on NWSChat, the better. NWSChat accounts increased in the area since November, which should improve situational awareness. Also popular with participants are emails with heads-up information, especially those that include low probability but high impact potential.

During the workshop, EMS expressed their desire to vet information before passing it to broadcasters. Broadcasters agreed, but in return expressed their need to get the information out quickly.

“With social media, there are a lot of different messages about weather going out, whether we like it or not,” said Fox, warning coordination meteorologist at WFO Ft. Worth. “By understanding how our partners work, we can help them by creating and communicating lifesaving messages when people need it most.”

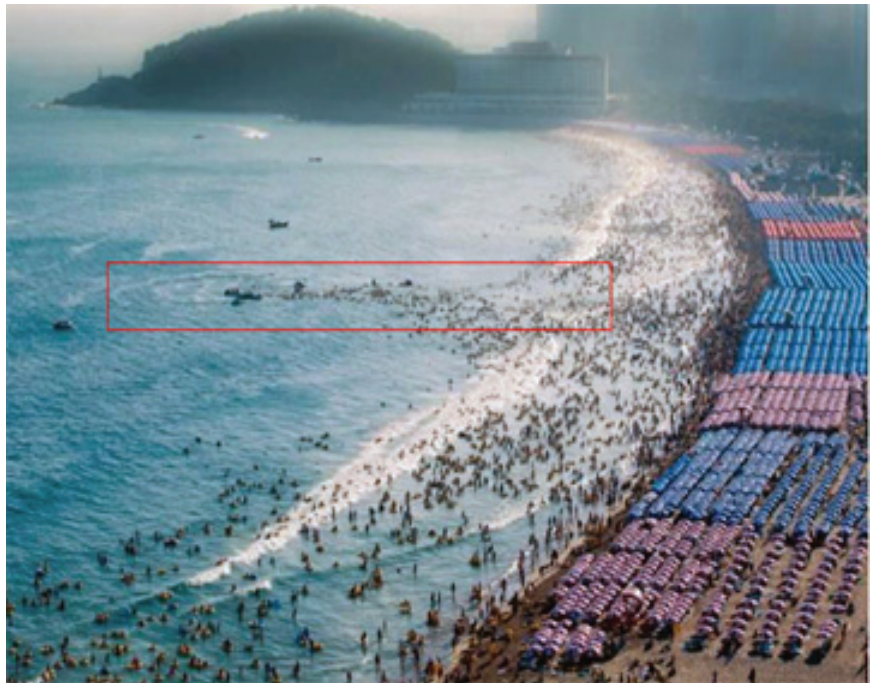
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## NWS Rip Current Program Helps South Korean Scientists

*Wayne Presnell, NWS Marine and Coastal Services Meteorologist*

Rip currents claim hundreds of lives each year on South Korea’s crowded beaches. To reduce those numbers, two South Korean scientists spent 6 weeks at the University of Delaware and visited the NOAA Sea Grant of Delaware to study rip currents.

On January 26, NWS headquarters staff hosted scientists from the Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Administration (KHOA) to share information about the NWS rip current program.



*Hundreds of people getting swept out to sea by a strong rip current at Haeundae Beach, Busan Korea. Unfortunately, there were 58 fatalities and over 100 people rescued due to this strong rip current.*

NWS Marine and Coastal Weather Services staff members offered examples of rip current outreach materials NWS uses such as brochures, whistles and beach balls, designed to get people’s attention.

NWS staff also ran through the [Rip Current Awareness website](#), the [Beach Hazards and Safety website](#) and the [NWS watch, warning and advisory webpage](#).

Many other countries use NOAA material as the basis for their programs by translating NWS materials and making them culturally appropriate for their citizens.

After the presentation, the Korean scientists explained KHOA’s structure and rip current program as well as the problems they have encountered. In Korea, because the beaches often are extremely crowded, rip currents can be particularly deadly, with dozens of people drowning and hundreds rescued in a given day.

The Korean program offers four threat levels: Concern, Watch,

Warning and Danger. The NWS uses Low, Moderate and High for rip current risk outlooks.

The full day program offered presentations by numerous NOAA groups, researching this danger. NWS and KHOA will continue to share ideas and information on mitigation of rip currents.

South Korea will host the 3rd [International Rip Current Symposium](#) June 22-24, 2014, bringing rip currents to the forefront in South Korea.

## Aware

NOAA’s National Weather Service  
Awareness and Performance Div.

Division Chief: **Cindy Woods**

Branch Chief: **Mike Szkil**

Managing Editor: **Melody Magnus**

Editors: **Donna Franklin, Nancy Lee**

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