



Aware

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Tabletop Exercises Help NWS Partners be Weather-Ready for Outdoor Events

By [Mike Bardou](#), WCM, NWS Chicago/Romeoville, IL

Weather is one of the primary hazards posed to any outdoor event, especially those with large crowds and limited sheltering capacity. Thorough and continuous monitoring of evolving weather hazards can lead to more confident and effective decisions for event-goers. Over the past 2 years, NWS Chicago has been collaborating with emergency management (EM) partners and area NWS offices to better arm decision makers with knowledge, skills and tools. Combining those essentials with NWS support, EMs can better ensure their readiness for weather-related threats. This step-by-step Weather Watcher process guides users through key services available from the NWS, strengthens their weather assessment skills, and encourages communication with the local forecast office.

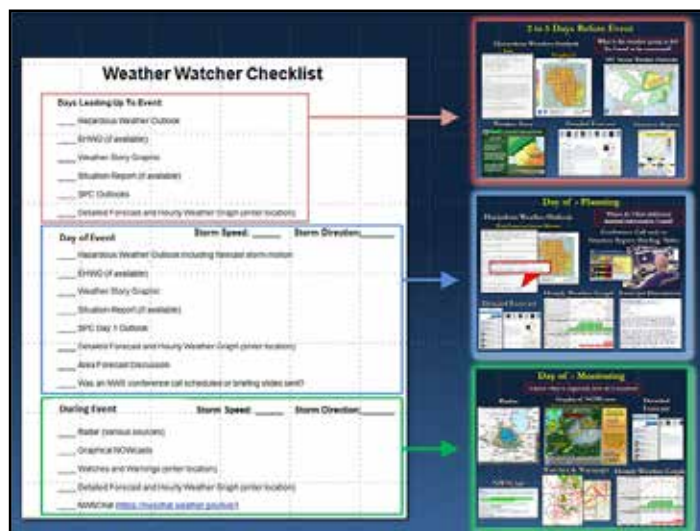
At the core of this process is a checklist that walks Weather Watchers through applicable NWS products and services available before an event. This checklist is a companion to a specially developed website containing all the data referenced in the checklist. In addition, a suite of training materials, including videos and printable guides, outline the functions of the Weather Watcher and leads users through the checklist and associated website.

To more directly raise awareness of the importance of planning for adverse weather and develop comfort and skill in using the tools, NWS Chicago collaborated with local EMs to develop and conduct 14 tabletop exercises across its county warning area, reaching more than 275 participants.

The exercise included training on how to use the Weather Watcher tools, the importance of estimating the time needed to evacuate or shelter patrons, and an interactive scenario during which participants played the role of Weather Watcher and decision maker for a mock outdoor event. This event included evaluating NWS information beginning several days before the event and accessing it via mocked-up versions of the operational Weather Watcher website. Players needed to assess if weather would impact their event and identify if and when they would execute their evacuation or shelter plan.

Feedback and lessons learned by NWS staff facilitating these exercises helped shape NWS decision support services and promote a greater awareness of critical NWS information and how it is applied to life-safety decisions. In addition, this effort has helped NWS offices more thoroughly understand the development and application of tabletop exercises and better align with how EMs function.

The Weather Watcher process is also a component to a larger "Event Ready" toolkit, developed by the DuPage County, IL, Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, a close partner with NWS Chicago. Event



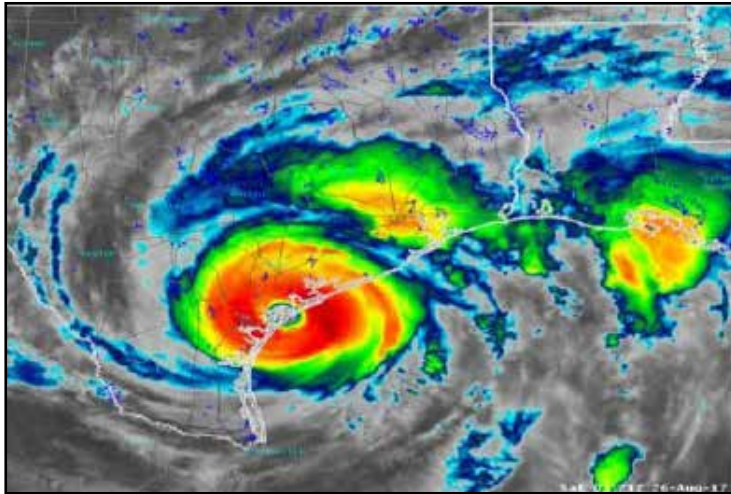
Weather Watcher Checklist

Ready provides tools and templates to help public safety officials plan for all types of hazards at special events. The checklist guides users through NWS products at different phases of weather hazard assessment leading up to and during an event.

Hurricane Harvey Service Assessment Now Online

Post by [NWS Communications Staff](#), Silver Spring, MD

NWS completed an assessment of agency performance for last year's historic Hurricane Harvey. The [Service Assessment](#) identified best practices and areas for improvement.



Hurricane Harvey over the Texas coast in 2017

The center of Hurricane Harvey made landfall near Rockport, TX, as a Category 4 hurricane. During a 4-day period, many areas received more than 40 inches of rain as the cyclone meandered over eastern Texas and adjacent waters, causing catastrophic flooding.

With peak accumulations of more than 60 inches of rain, Hurricane Harvey produced the most rain on record for a tropical storm or other weather event in the contiguous United States, causing an estimated \$125 billion in damage, according to NOAA. At least 68 fatalities were directly attributable to this event, the highest death toll due to a tropical system in Texas since Galveston Hurricane in 1919.

During service assessment interviews, partners overwhelmingly indicated the NWS performed very well throughout this event.

Consistent messaging across multiple platforms helped NWS communicate with EMs, government officials, and media partners and maintain good situational awareness. Residents in affected communities were likewise reasonably well prepared and able to take actions that potentially prevented much higher loss of life. Hurricane Harvey was one of the most broad tests so far of NWS's strategic emphasis on coordination and collaboration within a fully integrated field structure. By any measure, the unified performance of National Centers, Weather Forecast Offices, River Forecast Centers, and Regional Operations Centers serves as an encouraging benchmark for the progress NWS has made toward its goal of fully supporting a Weather-Ready Nation.

Hurricane Harvey After Action Review Gives Event Perspective

By [John Metz](#), WCM, NWS Corpus Christi, TX

In a continuing effort to prepare South Texans for a new Hurricane Season, NWS Corpus Christi took part in the 8th Annual Coastal Bend Hurricane Conference in Robstown, TX, May 2-3, 2018. The event brought together a record crowd of more than 1,000 professionals, including EMs, volunteer organizations, health care representatives and the private industry.

The conference provided networking opportunities, high quality training, and lessons learned for the next hurricane. The keynote addresses were given by Texas Division of Emergency Management Chief Nim Kidd, NWS



Emergency Managers from the Coastal Bend Emergency Management Association present NWS Corpus Christi, TX, Warning Coordination Meteorologist John Metz and District Coordinator for the Texas Division of Emergency Management Brandi Ashby-Fisher with medals of appreciation.

Warning Coordination Meteorologist John Metz and Insurance Council of Texas Rep. Mark Hanna, who presented his [documentary on Hurricane Harvey](#). Breakout sessions allowed participants to learn about all aspects of hurricane preparedness and recovery. The event also included an Awards Ceremony that recognized NWS WCM John Metz and District Coordinator for the Texas Division of Emergency Management Brandi Ashby-Fisher for their life saving efforts before, during and after Hurricane Harvey.

Following the conference, NWS Corpus Christi staff took part in a community-scale Hurricane Harvey After Action Review. Local, state, and federal partners discussed challenges organizations faced as Hurricane Harvey threatened the middle Texas coast.

With nearly 500 participants and all 15 Emergency Support Functions present, this is the largest After Action Review in which the NWS Corpus Christi office has taken part. One

of the many challenges discussed was how the rapid intensification of Hurricane Harvey led to local EMs working on a more compressed timeline. EMs expressed that despite these difficult circumstances, the message of the NWS forecast was received with confidence due to the pre-existing relationships between the NWS and the emergency management community.

An After Action Review of this size sheds light on the amount of people and moving parts that come together to support and protect our communities during high-impact weather events. This exercise enabled our staff to see first-hand how NWS forecasts and briefings played into the decision making process for our core partners as Hurricane Harvey threatened the Middle Texas Coast.

Monthly EM Meetings Forge Stronger Relationships

By [Vanessa Pearce](#), General Meteorologist, NWS Wichita, KS

Each month, EMs in the southeast region of Kansas hold a meeting that includes EMs, a regional EM representative from the state, the Red Cross, other service organizations, a health care representative and the NWS. In May, the meeting was held at NWS Wichita. This meeting included a tour of the office, a demonstration of how we manage decision support services and a chance to watch the weather event simulator and hot spot notification tool, which is used to spot wildfires.



NWS personnel provide an overview of operations to emergency management, animal response officials and the Red Cross.

Many of these representatives have never been inside a forecast office before and now were able to visualize our operations. We had the chance to strengthen our relationship with our partners. Hopefully there will be future meetings that can be held at our office by other regions within our area.

Pathways Open House Helps Inspire Future Leaders

By [Ivan Gumbs](#), [Taylor Pechacek](#), *Meteorology Interns*, and *NWS Pacific Regional WCM*

On June 12, 16 federal agencies in American Samoa joined forces to bring a first-of-its-kind event to the island. American Samoa’s Weather Service Office in Pago Pago hosted a Federal Pathways Open House. The Open House welcomed more than 400 high school students. Each school was divided into groups, allowing them to meet each agency partner on a more personal level. Partners of NWS Pago Pago were able to showcase different careers, scholarships, and Pathways internship opportunities available to the local students.

NWS offered the chance to see one of three balloon launches, one of which was an ozonesonde launch conducted by the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center.

The students worked in teams to simulate real-life teamwork. While inside the office, Forecaster Jane Taifane showed students how to create a forecast and explained radiosondes. Students also got to take a professional photo for future use.

Agencies taking part included the U.S. Army, Army Reserves, Senior ROTC at American Samoa Community College, NOAA Fisheries Pacific Islands, NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps, NOAA National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa, American Red Cross of American Samoa, Coral Reef Advisory Group, U.S. Department of the Interior (USDOI), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Park of American Samoa, U.S. Coast Guard, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), American Samoa Government Department of Marine and Wildlife Resource (DMWR), and NOAA WSO Pago Pago. Local Delights, a local food truck, catered the event.

“The passing of knowledge is the main cornerstone of the Fa’a Samoa (Samoan Way) I grew up with. As sciences, technologies, engineering, mechanics, and mathematics (STEMM) methodologies change at the speed of the world wide web, now more than ever we need to catch the children of Samoa up with these fast moving changes. The NWSO American Samoa sponsored Pathways Open-house was a successful joining of efforts by many STEMM professionals to bring their fields of expertise to the youth of Samoa; to share and pass-on their STEMM knowledge in hopes it will help our youth see and learn first hand the prerequisites for higher education and vocational training and certification pathways that will help them become professionals in their chosen field and outstanding members in the service of our community.” -Gataivai Talamoa NOAA/PIFSC Field Operations American Samoa.”



Weather Service Office Pago Pago Weather-Ready Nation Ambassadors help nurture the next generation of leaders.

Aware

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