

Aware

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Two Major Updates Coming for NWR and the EAS

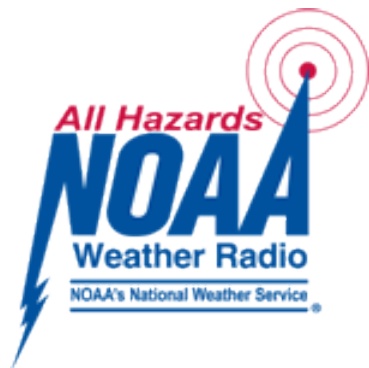
By [Tim Schott](#), NWS Dissemination Services

NWS is planning two major changes involving NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards (NWR) and the Emergency Alert System (EAS).

Blue Alerts

The first major dissemination change involves NWS conveying Blue Alerts over NWR and to the EAS. Blue Alerts, with an EAS Event Code of BLU, are the most recent message category authorized by the FCC for broadcast via EAS. Blue Alerts are used by state and local authorities to warn the public when there is actionable information related to a law enforcement officer who is missing, seriously injured, killed in the line of duty or when there is an imminent credible threat to an officer.

Broadcasters' encoder/decoder equipment is now ready to process the new event code. Over the next year, a number of state emergency communications committees and state broadcasters associations will update their state EAS plans to allow dissemination of Blue Alerts. NWS is now working aggressively to update multiple systems, such as NWR, to disseminate Blue Alerts when requested by authorized alerting officials. We expect WFOs to have this capability by the end of 2019 or early 2020.



Partial County Warnings

The second change incorporates Partial County Warnings in NWR and EAS as a future operational capability for all NWS Weather Forecast Offices (WFO).

For many years, NWS has received feedback about "too many EAS activations" associated with NWS warnings. Many broadcasters monitor NWR as one source for the warnings they convey to EAS. One of the challenges for the nation's EAS is that, in most cases, alerts are conveyed on a whole-county basis.

The FCC's Part 11 rules and current NWS policy allow NWS to send alerts via NWR Specific Area Message encoding (SAME) and EAS for pre-defined county partitions. Broadcasters are required to have EAS equipment that can process partial county warnings. Four WFOs (Duluth, MN; Glasgow, MT; Rapid City, SD; and Tucson, AZ) have been successfully partitioning one or more of their counties for NWR and EAS for many years. Because there are no immediate plans to disseminate warnings by polygon via NWR or EAS, NWS would like to provide all WFOs with this capability.

The use of partial county warnings is particularly beneficial for counties that are geographically large, oddly shaped or comprised of non-contiguous areas, such as islands. WFOs would still be able to alert entire counties. Partial county warnings could also be used for the dissemination of non-weather emergency messages.

It will likely take some time for this operational capability to be extended to all WFOs. However, any

implementation of partial county warnings must be thoroughly vetted and coordinated among state emergency communications committees, state broadcaster associations, emergency managers, state and local government officials and NWS and preceded by comprehensive public education and outreach efforts.

If there is interest in further exploring whether partial county alerting might be helpful in targeting warning messages for a specific county, please contact your local WCM or me for additional information.

Responding to Historic Snowfall and Near Hurricane Force Winds

By [David King](#), Coordinator, Campbell County EMA

Between December 10-14, 2018, northeast Wyoming experienced two storms in one week that contained “historic” snowfall and winds approaching hurricane force. The events resulted in a week-long power outage affecting eastern Montana, Wyoming and Colorado and western Nebraska along with North and South Dakota!

All of these calamities were a “virtual” series of events invented as part of two exercises designed in partnership with the WFO Rapid City, SD, and the Wyoming National Guard. The goal of the exercise was to stress the personnel within the Campbell County, WY, Emergency Operations Center (EOC).



From left, staffing the SIMCELL in the Campbell County, WY, Mobile Command Unit are Melanie Wilmer, Crook/Weston County Public Health Response Coordinator and Major Shawn Stensaas, WY National Guard. Photo by Denise Bradshaw.

Rapid City Warning Coordination Meteorologist (WCM) Susan Sanders developed NWS products for the mythical storms. Because the Rapid City WFO has access to Campbell County’s WebEOC®, Sanders and other NWS forecasters inserted the NWS products in the appropriate boards twice a day during the 4-day exercise.

The virtual events kicked off on December 10 with the first series of injects detailing the power outage and ominous warnings posted by forecasters from Rapid City.

Storm Number 1 hit overnight with 8-10 inches of snow, cold temperatures, but surprisingly for the region, only light winds. Storm Number 2 was due in by 4 pm Friday with similar snow amounts, but near-hurricane force winds that would last for 3 days. The physical EOC stood up for exercise play on Friday afternoon, with participants scattered about the EOC and the Simulation Cell (SIMCELL). The SIMCELL continued to provide injects throughout the afternoon’s session.

Not only did Sanders participate in the SIMCELL, there were two Rapid City forecasters who “just happened to be stranded in Gillette” at the EOC when it was activated Friday afternoon. Meteorologist Shane Eagan and Lead Forecaster Jeff Johnson were among the 44 participants taking part in the training event.

Of course, even though the reality was blue skies and temperatures in the 40s outside the EOC on December 14, when a December winter storm blew through the region the following week, many were suggesting the next EOC exercise scenario should feature a beach somewhere tropical!

IDSS Deployment Ready Training–Core Partner Integration

By Meteorologist [Amos Dodson](#) and WCM [Michael Lewis](#), NWS Northern Indiana

During the week of February 4, active weather across southern Indiana provided the perfect backdrop for completing Impact-based Decision Support Services training task books for three NWS Northern Indiana

meteorologists. Over those 3 days, the meteorologist on duty received a call from an Incident Commander, played by a local Emergency Manager, requesting deployment to the Incident Command Post. The roles of incident commander, planning section chief, operations chief and media rep were filled by several core partners and television meteorologists from Fort Wayne, IN.

Each day, based on the weather, the team selected a new location. The exercise included a train derailment close to a population center with an increasingly complex weather scenario. Mother Nature obliged by providing convective weather during the first operational period and rapidly changing conditions for subsequent operational periods.

Throughout the exercise, the partners were actively monitoring NWSChat (iwxexercise), WebEOC and real-time weather pages. The meteorologists were tasked with filing appropriate paperwork, gathering equipment, deploying to the offsite Command Center, filling out requested forms, providing briefings, coordinating with the NWS office, posting materials through WebEOC and conducting a media interview during a simulated Press Conference.

During the hot wash, Ed Rock, Kosciusko County Emergency Manager, commented on the value of the exercise, “I learned more about your services and capabilities.”

Additionally, Keith Walters, Wabash County EMA stated the use of the Experimental Enhanced Data Display provided a lot of information that would benefit his routine operations. Rick Dolsen, Indiana Department of Homeland Security District Coordinator, stated that he would “promote this at the district meetings” and “encourage other EMA directors to take advantage of the exercises.”

Following the press conference, Joe Strus WANE TV, said the exercise “provided us with practice on formulating good questions and using our video equipment more efficiently.” Joe encouraged us to provide more of these training opportunities. Caleb Saylor, WFFT TV, Fort Wayne, commented he would like other meteorologists and reporters from his station to participate.



Media interviews were conducted by local television meteorologists. Here Caleb Saylor, WFFT TV Fort Wayne, IN, interviews NWS Meteorologist Lonnie Fisher during a mock press conference.

Huge Turnout for Storm Spotter Event by Amateur Radio Operators

By [Jay Farlow](#), Allen County, IN, Assistant Emergency Coordinator, Amateur Radio Emergency Service

At least 138 people, not including speakers, attended a storm spotter education event Feb. 21, 2019, organized by the Allen County, IN, branch of the national Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES). Speakers included ARES leaders, the local Homeland Security director, the deputy director of the community’s 911/public safety dispatching agency and broadcast meteorologists from four Fort Wayne TV stations.

The local ARES team decided to organize the event when its leaders learned in late October 2018 that NWS Northern Indiana (IWX) would be unable to provide spotter training in Fort Wayne before the spring 2019 storm season. In recent years, IWX conducted the training early each year in Fort Wayne, the largest city in its county warning area. Changing office responsibilities forced IWX staff to revise its spotter training schedule. The new schedule results in most counties receiving spotter training every other year. IWX provided, however, much of the content that speakers at the ARES event presented, including:

- ◆ Why storm spotters are important
- ◆ Storm spotter safety
- ◆ The roles of Homeland Security and 911/dispatch
- ◆ Thunderstorm basics, types and hazards
- ◆ Cloud identification
- ◆ What and how to report

Results from a web-based survey of attendees indicated:

- ◆ More than half had never attended any kind of storm spotter training previously, despite the fact that more than 50 percent were also licensed amateur radio operators.
- ◆ Nearly 97 percent of respondents described the event overall as either “very good” or “excellent”
- ◆ More than 95 percent described speakers as “very engaging” or “extremely engaging”
- ◆ More than 98 percent described the information presented as “very useful” or “extremely useful.”



ARES leader Jim Moehring opens his team’s storm spotter education event by discussing the role and importance of spotters. Photo by Bruce Saylor, ARES.

The event also supported a positive image for volunteer storm spotters, amateur (ham) radio and ARES. Email comments from Allen County Office of Homeland Security Director Bernie Beier reflected this view: “My personal respect and appreciation for what you do was significantly increased last night. You are truly cornerstones in the foundation of our severe weather preparedness program. Your personal efforts make Allen County a better-prepared, more-resilient community... you make us StormReady!”

ARES is a program of [ARRL](http://www.arrl.org), the national association for amateur radio®. ARES establishes teams of volunteer, licensed amateur radio operators in counties throughout the country, each of which is led by an emergency coordinator.

These volunteer teams train and practice to provide communication services to their communities in the event of a disaster. Through a memorandum of understanding signed by ARRL and the NWS, ARES volunteers also commit to communicating weather information that assists the NWS in the creation of weather warnings. In addition, ARES volunteers practice their communication skills by providing two-way radio communications at public events, such

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