

VISIBILITY OF NATIONAL METEOROLOGICAL OR HYDROMETEOROLOGICAL SERVICES (NMSs)

Report of Working Group – 3, Subgroup on Regional Aspects of PWS in RA VI

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The key areas for enhancing National Meteorological or Hydrometeorological Service (NMS) are:

Relationship with the Media

Improving relationships with the media impacts favourably both on the visibility and status of the NMSs, and on public safety by eliminating possible confusion or misunderstanding. There are two distinct ways to build a positive relationship with the media:

1. *Ad-hoc basis (reactive relationship)*

This refers to relationships built during a severe weather event or the period leading up to an event. All media must have access to appropriate weather information. Specifically:

- (a) Someone should be identified as a point of contact for public relations in the event of severe weather. This contact could be a forecaster and during the period of heightened interest from the media, he/she should have specific duties: monitoring the event and keeping the media informed.
- (b) The public relations manager could organize meetings with the media representatives to inform them of the event evolution (for relevant procedures see WMO/TD No. 1088). A specific space/office has to be available for this work.
- (c) After the event, the public relations manager would revert to his normal duty (weather forecaster, etc.). If appropriate, different staff could be nominated to be public relations manager for different severe weather events. An internal report on the event management could be prepared to incorporate any “lessons learnt” for future interviews.
- (d) During normal weather conditions, the forecaster in charge should provide interviews to the media. Forecaster involvement builds credibility with the public, increases public awareness of an NMS and provides an opportunity to explain the forecasts.

2. *Developing a permanent relationship*

This section refers to a long-term supplier/customer relationship with the media, but up over a period of time. It would be useful for the main point of contact to have a good knowledge of meteorology and be able to liaise effectively with customers. Specifically:

- (a) An NMS should establish a written agreement with all media interested in publishing or broadcasting meteorological output (state and private media). The agreement should contain the details of all required products and services in both normal and severe weather conditions.
- (b) Internal instructions must be provided to relevant staff detailing each agreement with information such as:
 - Data and products supplied
 - The time data/products are required
 - How the data/products are disseminated
 - Contact details

(WMO/TD Nos. 1103 and 1084)

- (c) The NMS Production unit responsible for media output may have different dissemination methods for normal and severe weather conditions. It is preferable that representatives from the media call for information to a nominated telephone number during severe weather events.
- (d) The agreement with the media could include provision for interviews with NMS specialists. They will explain interesting meteorological behaviour in the country and around the world, how a forecast is produced, how much work it includes, everything considered useful for increasing public understanding.
- (e) NMS organize meetings with the media representatives on how to meet their requirements, product questionnaire or Web page to obtain their suggestions.
- (f) Distributing brochures about the weather forecast in general, the products in particular

Relationship with Government and National Committees for Disaster Reduction

Due to increasing national and global economic problems, many NMSs have to justify continuous government support, especially significant investment such as automated surface stations, data processing supercomputers and radars. To maintain a good relationship with government bodies, the NMS should:

1. Supply data and products to the appropriate department. For example, the city forecasts on the WMO web site may be used to advise VIPs regarding their travels.
2. Provide timely advice to emergency planners, raising the understanding of weather forecast and warnings.
3. Provide forecast verification data to the national relevant authorities.
4. Help to identify connections between severe weather events and damage to property/infrastructure.
5. Collect data about damage associated with severe weather events.

Relationship with Commercial Customers

The relationship is usually established on the basis of a formal contract and the NMS will have contractual obligations to provide any commercial products or services to agreed specifications. Evaluation or verification of the service provided by the NMS is desirable to maintain a positive relationship with the customer. This may involve use of a questionnaire to find out their opinions (WMO/TD Nos. 1023 and 1103).

Direct Services to the Public

Services to the general public may include:

1. A web home page with a feedback option.
2. Provision of basic national and regional scripts, usually provided via media such as radio or other web sites.
3. Visits of school children, teachers or local groups. Also NMS specialists, such as forecasters may act as invited speakers.

Forecast Presentations

There are two cases:

1. Media/users requiring complete product/service

Depending on the structure of each NMS, a dedicated unit for preparing graphics may be required to provide a full service to the media. If necessary, the forecaster should prepare a basic product, which can be modified to the requirements of different customers. Any dedicated graphics unit are likely to work very closely to the forecaster in charge. See WMO/TD Nos. 1080 and 1084 for further guidance.

2. Media/users produce their own graphics/presentations

In the case of media customers who prepare their own graphics, it is important to try and monitor the output to maintain quality. However, it is difficult to convince the customer that they should change the emphasis of their presentation. The guidance available from WMO/TD No. 1080 may be useful.

TV Weather Presenters

Most TV stations have their own staff for presentations, often non-meteorologists, who have little knowledge of the weather. In this respect, it is recommended that each NMS organize national training courses to ensure basic weather knowledge for presenters. The courses should be free of charge; NMS' will benefit in the longer term, from more consistent presentations and less public criticism of the forecast.

Training for Staff Involved in Media Work

In general, there seems to be a lack of training on PWS. It is important that staff, including forecasters, who are involved in public relations and dealing with the media should be trained appropriately. It is equally important that NMS managers be trained in the organization of public weather services.

Monitoring Forecast Quality

A major role of an NMS is to monitor and improve the quality of its products and services. Secondly, NMSs have to ensure that they meet user requirements, and that users have a positive perception of, and are satisfied with the products. This will increase the visibility of an NMS and maintain a good relationship with the public. The verification process should include:

1. Establishment of a skill and accuracy reference against which subsequent changes in forecast procedures or the introduction of new technology can be measured;
2. Identification of the specific strengths and weaknesses in a forecaster's skills and the need for forecaster training;
3. Information to the management about a forecast programme's past and current level of skill to plan future improvements; information can be used in making decisions concerning the organizational structure, modernization and restructuring of the NMS.

The evaluation of the user satisfaction is also necessary since even a highly accurate and skilful forecast will not produce an effective public weather services programme if it does not respond to user needs.