Hazard Simplification Project - FAQs Sheet
Major Change Coming to NWS' Hazard Messaging System

Introduction

NWS is removing the terms "Advisory" and "Special Weather Statement" from NWS' Hazard Messaging headline system; NWS will implement changes no earlier than calendar year 2025. This decision is based on results of extensive social science research with partners and the public documenting significant confusion among current NWS headline terms.

The "Advisory" and "Special Weather Statement" headlines, which are currently used to denote less serious hazards, will no longer be used. In their place, we will use plain language headlines featuring clear, impact-based information.

This sheet documents the frequently asked questions from a more general perspective, as well as a deeper, technical dive.
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General Q&A

Question #1: When and how will the change occur? Will it happen all at once for all hazard types and locations? How will I find out about the implementation date?

Answer: An implementation date for this change has not yet been set, but it won't occur any earlier than calendar year 2025. Our goal is to complete this change all at once for all hazard types and locations, but any adjustments or updates to this plan would be described in future Public Information Statements (PNS). NWS also plans to stay in close contact with partners along the way to ensure transparency. Advanced notice of the implementation will be provided publicly via a Service Change Notice (SCN) at least 6 months in advance.

Question #2: Which NWS products will be impacted by this change?

Answer: All products that carry the headline "Advisory" or "Special Weather Statement" will be impacted. Exceptions to this include Center Weather Advisory, space weather, and tropical cyclone advisories; these are used to contain descriptive information only.

The headline term of "Special Weather Statement" will be discontinued but the information will still be disseminated in the same manner as done currently. The message will also transition to a bulleted "What, Where, When, Impacts" format and adopt machine readable codes to assist partners in tracking (more on this below and in the Technical Q&A).

Question #3: Which Advisories will _not_ transition to plain language headlines?

Answer: The Small Craft Advisory will transition to a "Small Craft Warning." This decision was made based on the direct threat to life and property of these hazards. Options for the Tsunami Advisory are still being considered.

Question #4: How will this change impact me?

Answer: The impact on NWS partners and the public will likely vary. Some partners may need to prepare and adjust their systems for the change since they ingest specific information within our messages. A member of the public looking for information on an upcoming winter event would no longer see a "Winter Weather Advisory" issued for their area. Instead they would see a plain language headline describing the situation. As an example, it could read, "SNOW: Hazards travel until 8PM CDT."

Question #5: Will I still receive information about events that are currently at the Advisory level? And in what way?

Answer: Yes! In fact, the content within our Advisory products won't change - you will still see the "What, Where, When, Impacts" bullets and machine-readable codes. Plain language headlines will also be disseminated through the same channels as Advisory is today. For instance, you'll see Advisory-level information on our maps and local forecast pages.

Question #6: What will the plain language headlines say?

Answer: The plain language headlines will start with the hazard name in all caps (e.g. SNOW, WIND, HEAT), followed by a description of the hazard and/or the impact.

Question #7: How will plain language headlines be shown on the NWS' national Watch, Warning, Advisory (WWA) map and local forecast pages?

Answer: Currently our national WWA map displays all Advisories and Special Weather Statements. To determine the best method of displaying plain language headlines on the national WWA map and the local forecast pages, we are engaging with our public and partners via a survey (link on Haz Simp website).

Question #8: Will this change impact current NWS Watches and Warnings?

Answer: No, all Watches and Warnings that are issued in today's system will continue to be issued in exactly the same manner.

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Technical Q&A

Question #9: Will the plain language headlines have machine readable codes such as Valid Time Event Code (VTEC)?

Answer: Yes! Advisories all currently have VTECs associated with them - when they transition to plain language, they will retain the same phenomenon code, but adopt a new significance code. All plain language headlines will have a ".S" significance code. For instance, Wind Advisory would transition from WI.**Y** to WI.**S**.

This concept will also be extended to Special Weather Statements, which currently do not carry a VTEC string. Because of this, they're more difficult to track and the hazard type is not immediately obvious. After the change is implemented, they will adopt phenomenon codes based on the hazard they address and a ".S" significance code. For example, a current Special Weather Statement about a minor fog event would transition to a VTEC of FG.S.

Question #10: Will this change impact Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) elements?

Answer: The current default values for Urgency, Severity, Certainty (USC) within CAP that are used today for Advisories and Special Weather Statements will generally transfer to their plain language replacements.