

NWS Melbourne Marine Web Letter

March 2008

Spring Weather

Now that "Meteorological winter" (Dec.-Feb) is over and Spring is beginning, what general weather trends can be expected? One thing that is common is that we get into what I call "springtime breezy" conditions quite often. High pressure centers behind cold fronts tend to stay well to the north as they cross the eastern seaboard, and hence we have extended periods of breezy, onshore winds. The large contrast in land and water temperatures also plays a part in these breezy conditions, especially along the coast.

Climatologically, the months of March and April are the windiest months for coastal sections. Fronts tend to become weaker and gradually start to produce less rainfall, especially in April and May.

Also during the Spring, the sun angle increases and brings higher chances for sea breeze generated storms.

Some of these storms can cross the coast and be severe, so always check the [Hazardous Weather Outlook](#) to know what direction the storms will be moving. The latest projections indicate that we will have below normal rainfall during Spring due to the persistence of La Nina conditions. Therefore boating trips should be affected by showers/storms less frequently than in an average year. Temperatures should continue to average warmer than normal.

One thing that boaters might not think about during the warm 80 degree weather of Spring is that if they have a mishap or their boat malfunctions, and are forced overboard, the water temperatures are still quite cool. This is especially true for the boaters on inland lakes where air temperatures can start to approach 90 degrees. Unfortunately there are several cases in recent years where hypothermia has contributed to boater deaths. Though National Safe Boating Week is May 17-23, Florida has year-round boating, so mariners need to always be aware of hazards while out on the water.

Buoys

41009 went adrift on 2/21 at 2330Z. The National Data Buoy Center does not know how it happened but they said that usually a large boat comes too close and shears the cable securing the buoy to its mooring. Luckily, NASA was able to expediate redeployment and the buoy returned to service on 3/6.

We all owe a big thank you to those who made the quick two week turnaround happen, since the buoy data is very important to boaters and forecasters.

I will repeat my admonition from last year about being careful around buoys:

No Tie-Ups, Please!

On a serious note, I have received reports that boaters are frequently tied up to buoy 41009. I have been told by the National Data Buoy Center that this can affect the wave data and hence could have a negative impact on forecasts. The Buoy Center also reports that a lot of fishing line is removed from buoy masts whenever they are serviced. This fishing line can lead to intermittent communications outages and of course literally "tie up" the anemometer (wind speed measuring device).

If you tie up to the buoy or break your line off on it, you might be "shooting yourself in the foot" along with all mariners who rely on the data. The Coast Guard will not allow boats to tie up to a buoy or navigational aide and will interdict when tie ups are observed.

Marine Point & Click Forecasts are Coming!

Many users of NWS products are aware of the Point & Click forecasts available on our [web site](#). Simply place your mouse pointer at any spot over land and click for the forecast. I am pleased to inform you that this capability is now being planned for the Coastal Waters. You might recall that recently NWS Melbourne made the marine zones smaller over the east central Florida coastal waters, but the forecast is still an average across the zone. One great advantage that mariners will discover in the Point & Click forecast is that they will not be getting a wind/sea forecast that is an average over a rather large zone. Instead, you will

get the best forecast that modern science can provide at your favorite fishing spot! By the way, if you wonder whether anyone will keep track of the lat/lon you click on, the answer is "no." So your fishing spot will remain a secret!

I often get complaints about our forecasts near the coast, especially during the cool season (the forecast is either too pessimistic or too optimistic). In reality, there are often big differences in the winds/seas within a few miles. With the point & click forecast, boaters should get a better feel as to whether they need to stay close to shore or can go out 10 miles.

Stay tuned to the "latest news" section on our [web site](#) for an announcement about when Marine Point & Click forecasts will be available.

Near Shore Wave Model -- Update on Progress

Work is progressing steadily on the development of a coupled ocean/atmosphere model for the near shore Atlantic waters. More accurate wind/sea forecasts with higher resolution are the goal of the project.

Plans for the rest of the year are to 1) enter an experimental phase where model simulations are performed, evaluated for accuracy and then fine tuned and 2) implement a preliminary system build that couples the wave model and NCEP forecast wind fields. The implementation of the latter item will include basic graphics including significant wave height, mean wave period and direction for the coastal zone. The following year will see the integration of the offshore wind data and the inclusion of the nearshore hydrodynamic model so as to combine both wind/wave and wave/current interactions.

National Safe Boating Week is May 17-23, 2008

Here is a script I wrote for Safe Boating Week last year that played on NOAA Weather Radio:

Statistics show that over 70 percent of recreational boating deaths are due to drowning. Of that total, 85 percent of the victims were not wearing life jackets.

Florida has over a million registered boats and leads the nation in boating fatalities with an average of about 65 per year.

The primary causes of accidents are carelessness, recklessness and navigational rules violations. The number one factor in fatal accidents is alcohol.

Something as simple as wearing life jackets would save the lives of nearly 40 Floridians each year. Following basic safety rules, being careful and not boating under the influence would also save many lives.

Data shows that about 80 percent of boat operators involved in fatal accidents have never taken a boating safety course. Check with your local Coast Guard Auxiliary or Power Squadron about safe boating courses. Discounts on marine insurance often apply to those who complete safety courses. Also, check with local marinas for free Vessel Safety Check events as mechanical malfunctions also cause many accidents.

A boating hazard that is often overlooked is hypothermia. Water temperatures in the 50s and 60s occur for much of the central Florida cool season. Since 2000, an average of at least 2 people die each year due to hypothermia, including strong swimmers who are forced overboard.

The best protection is to always wear a life jacket, especially when boating alone or far from shore. It only takes a small trauma such as a bump to the head or for the body to develop a hypothermic condition in order to inhibit ones swimming ability. Also, remember to let family or friends know your boating plans before disembarking.

Remember, You're in Command. Boat Responsibly.

The next Marine Web Letter can be expected during June or July. Feel free to contact me by email, Randy.Lascody@noaa.gov.

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