



**Left:** *Barry Goldsmith* describes Rio Grande Valley hurricane climatology in late June. **Right:** Tropical Program Leader *Justin Gibbs* explains how to use tropical cyclone wind speed probabilities provided by the National Hurricane Center.

## NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley Hosts Partner Meetings Full-Day Session Covers Hurricanes, Introduces Integrated Weather Information Team

**WESLACO, Texas, May 29, 2013** – Meteorologist-in-Charge *Steve Drillette*, Warning Coordination Meteorologist *Barry Goldsmith*, Science and Operations Officer *Doug Butts*, and Tropical Program Leader *Justin Gibbs* hosted and presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Partners' Hurricane Meeting. More than 75 persons filled the City of Weslaco Legislative Chambers to learn about Texas' hurricane history, the 2013 season forecast and what it means to the Rio Grande Valley, challenges in communicating threat beyond the Saffir-Simpson scale, updated tropical cyclone products and services, and more. The full agenda is available [here](#). Presentations are available upon request. The diverse crowd included partners in the following organizations:

- City, County, Regional, and State level Emergency Management (Dept. of Public Safety/Police/Fire)
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (Dept. of Homeland Security)
- U.S. Postal Service
- U.S. Department of Transportation
- U.S. Consulate General (Dept. of State)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- International Boundary and Water Commission (Dept. of State)
- American Red Cross
- Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
- Texas General Land Office
- Texas Department of Transportation
- Texas Health and Human Services
- Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (COG)
- Cameron and Hidalgo County Health and Human Services
- Harlingen Consolidated and Brownsville Independent School District(s)
- McAllen Public Works
- Mission Housing Authority
- Media: KRGV-TV-5 (ABC), KFXV-TV-2 (FOX), La Feria News

H-E-B® graciously provided a full continental breakfast and box lunches for the conference attendees. Texas Department of Public Safety Region 3A worked with the City of Weslaco to find the most comfortable venue to fit the expected large crowd; recent installation of 80-inch HDTV monitors allowed even those sitting in the back of the room to see most details in the presentation and video. "NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley

always appreciates the incredible support of our core partners,” said Goldsmith. “We strive to reinforce their ability to find trusted information from our dedicated team, and bring new ideas and concepts to each meeting that will arm them with a deeper understanding of how to interpret long term seasonal forecasts and how to use impact-based forecasts to make smart decisions for their communities.”

### **Kickoff Meeting of the RGV Integrated Weather Information Team (iWIT)**

Following a lunch break, WCM Goldsmith led off the afternoon with an overview of the Integrated Warning\* Team Concept, then invited selected partners from five specific user groups to speak on how weather information is used in their decisions, from daily operations to large events. The five groups included:

- Emergency Management (City of Brownsville, Hidalgo County, Texas Department of Public Safety Region 3A – Lower Valley, Texas DPS Region 3 – South Texas, and Texas Division of Emergency Management/Austin, U.S. Border Patrol)
- Environment/Land Management (Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas General Land Office)
- Public Health and Recovery (Cameron and Hidalgo County Health and Human Services, American Red Cross)
- Media (KRGV-TV Channel 5)
- Education (Brownsville Independent School District)

Each speaker used examples to show how weather information can be used for successful outcomes. Examples ranged from the high level of a webinar or “blast” e-mail, to the basic level of a trusted phone call. Several recognized the importance of having NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley in their ‘backyard.’

City of Brownsville Assistant City Manager Jeff Johnston praised the office as being the most trusted weather information source among other providers’ services, and Hidalgo County Emergency Management Coordinator Oscar Montoya mentioned how “blast up” e-mails are distributed to hundreds of community officials who have used the information to save the county thousands of dollars, as well as a desire for abbreviated messages that highlight potential impact to simplify for wider distribution. Cameron County Department of Health Administrator Fidel Calvillo described the importance of wind speed and direction forecasts after heavy rains have brought the onset of mosquitoes, and “vector” spraying can only be successful when speeds are below 10 mph. Joseph Hilliard of the Texas General Land Office described the importance of wind speed and direction forecasts at various points along Laguna Madre, and how these forecasts determine if airboats and other water craft can operate safely. Alan Shoemaker, weekend meteorologist on KRGV-TV-5, discussed the growing importance of social media in communicating with the public.

The session closed with an open forum for which the 25 remaining participants discussed how to work toward common and consistent messaging in the future. Social media, text messaging, and “buzzwords” were mentioned as effective methods to get critical weather information, and heads nodded when the topic of positive action-oriented messaging was brought up as a means to rouse people to prepare for hazardous weather.

Tropical Program Leader Gibbs was impressed. “I was pleasantly surprised at the number of people who said they check our forecast ‘every day’ and how much NWS Brownsville/Rio Grande Valley drives decisions across the region.”

Future meetings are planned for later 2013 and beyond.

\*Discussion centered much more on weather information vs. weather warning; we’ve re-branded the concept.



**Left:** *Oscar Montoya*, Hidalgo County Texas Emergency Management Coordinator, explains how blast weather e-mails are distributed to hundreds of county and city officials. **Right:** KRGV-TV-5 meteorologist *Alan Shoemaker* explains how Facebook has become a critical tool for two-way weather communication.