National Weather Service Impact-Based Decision Support Services Provided During the October 2015 South Carolina Floods

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Background

- Slow moving upper low west of the Carolinas combined with persistent onshore flow off the Atlantic and a plume of tropical moisture associated with Hurricane Joaquin
- Deep, moist warm layer provided efficient warm rain processes resulting in record rainfall with many locations measuring over 20 inches of rain in less than 24 hours resulting in historic flooding across central and coastal South Carolina
- Major River flooding with new established record crests at 17 river gauges with 15 others recording crests in the top 5 for the period of record
- 1500 water rescues and 19 fatalities (9 within Columbia Metro area), many of which were individuals trapped in vehicles swept into high water
- Estimated $1.492 Billion in damages in South Carolina including closure of 410 1, 2, 3 and 4 day rainfall records broken

Best Practices for Impact-Based Decision Support Services (IDSS)

- Continuous relationship-building with EMs as well as other state/federal/local partners, solidified with continuously-held meetings, workshops, and exercises
- Constantly updated briefings via conference calls, webinars, and e-mail PowerPoint-based briefing packages
- Effective use of new media platforms, such as Skype, to conduct interviews with local/national media
- Consistent coordination with internal and related partners, such as WPC, SERFC, and USGS to keep the flow of information two-way (For this event, great thanks to USGS for their hard work, rapid deployment of gages, and constant updating of streamflow information for relaying to SERFC) – Does this work for everyone?
- Effective use of social media to inform the public and partners of weather forecasts and hazardous weather situations
- High-impact wording such as “historic”, “life-threatening”, and “catastrophic” used to convey seriousness of threat; also extra communication to specify the threat was heavy rainfall, not Tropical Storm Joaquin
- “Outside-the-box” techniques used to relay information not otherwise available, such as using historical records to show impacts on non-gaged creeks/streams, using the Damage Assessment Toolkit for flood surveys, individual coordination calls with dam operators and EMs to get important info to the SERFC

User Feedback

- “...Your briefings were concise, easy to follow, and most importantly accurate! Our planning efforts were made much easier through this communication channel, and we certainly appreciate all your office does for our region.” - Jennifer T. (Manager, University Risk Management, Medical University of SC)
- “Thank you for what you do to keep us informed!” - Pam A. (Social Media)
- “During this event, NWS Offices [Charleston, Columbia, Greenville-Spartanburg and Wilmington as well as the SERFC] contributed to overall statewide emergency operations. These contributions were not only to the highest standard, but the collective efforts to synchronize a common integrated prediction and support product suite provided invaluable to South Carolina. These Meteorologists provided round the clock decision support to include conference calls, emails, briefings, and offline dialogue. The forecast products were clear and concise. Early warnings prevented loss of life and contributed to public messaging prior to the flood’s peak. From the initial forecast and throughout the event, the NWS remained proactive and vigilant in their quest to provide support.” – Kim S. (SCEMD Director)

IDSS Provided During Historic October 2015 Flooding Event

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*numbers may not be exact as some events could have been overlooked during busy event

Infrared satellite image of the intense rainfall impacting South Carolina during the morning of October 3rd, 2015. Source: National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

In a briefing sent to partners during the flooding event. Source: NWS GSP – Tony Sturby (CAE)