National Weather Service
Weather Watcher Guide
Purpose

This full-length guide is intended to provide background knowledge of the primary NWS products and services in support of public safety decisions. This full-length guide is part of a suite of resources that support effective use of a “weather watcher”. The full suite of resources includes:

- This Full Length Guide
- Weather Watcher Quick-Start Guide
- Outdoor Event Weather Watcher video tutorial: https://youtu.be/ZmH6vnup92o
- Weather Watcher Checklist (see Appendix C)
- Weather Watcher Briefing Page
- Additional training and a tabletop exercise may be available from your local NWS

Why a Weather Watcher?

Have you ever been responsible for safety of an outdoor event? If so, you have probably had concerns about the weather.

Weather is a key component of any effective outdoor event action plan. A thorough evaluation of weather hazards and continuous monitoring of evolving hazards can lead to more confident and effective decisions regarding the safety of event-goers.

The weather watcher is the person who is designated to maintain situational awareness of the weather both before and during your event and can activate your weather safety plan.

This guide will outline the functions of the weather watcher, outline a weather evaluation and monitoring process that the weather watcher can follow and provide an overview of key forecast and monitoring products and tools utilized by the weather watcher.

This guide was produced in collaboration with NWS Chicago and NWS Quad Cities.
Last updated March 15, 2018
Contents

Planning for your Event 3
The Role of the Weather Watcher 5
Weather Evaluation Basics 6
Key Weather Terms 7
Daily Assessment (Before the Event) 9
Monitoring Phase (During the Event) 17
Appendix A: Outdoor Event Planning Considerations 24
Appendix B: Time Needed to Shelter Worksheet 25
Appendix C: Weather Watcher Checklist 26
Planning for your Event

All event plans should address four primary questions:
1. Which weather hazards could impact your event?
2. Where should people shelter or evacuate?
3. How will you alert people?
4. How long will it take to notify people and then evacuate or seek shelter?

Which weather hazards could impact your event?

Potential weather hazards for outdoor events include lightning, flooding, high wind, thunderstorms, and tornadoes. Depending on the time of year and nature of your event, fog, heat, or winter weather may also be a concern. If your weather safety plan has well-defined action criteria, then activating the plan should be easy.

For most outdoor events, lightning will trigger your safety plan. Lightning is a threat to anyone outside of a solid, fully enclosed structure. Lightning occurs with all thunderstorms so every thunderstorm is a threat to anyone outside, whether there is a watch or warning or not. Lightning can also strike areas several miles away from a thunderstorm. All evacuation and sheltering should be completed by the time any thunderstorm reaches an 8 mile radius around the venue. A larger radius can be used if desired.

Where should people shelter?

Shelter locations and timing go hand-in-hand. We recommend that everyone be able to reach shelter in less than 3 minutes. The logistics of and time required to evacuate or move people to the shelter areas must be considered. For example, congestion at stairwells and doorways may slow the sheltering process. Mobility-impaired people may require special assistance and more time.

To determine shelter locations within a building, we recommend that shelter areas be identified with the help of an engineer or architect familiar with each building's design. In general, you should look for areas that are:

- on the lowest floor
- have a roof span less than 30 feet
- without windows

Do not use these for shelter:
- tents
How will you alert people?

The Power of Pre-notification
When you know a particular risk exists, pre-notification allows people to prepare themselves for something unusual that may occur. For example, when event staff know that storms are expected, they may re-familiarize themselves with shelter areas and stay alert for PA announcements.

Response is enhanced when people are already aware that there may be a need to change their plans.

Pre-notification can be accomplished through any number of simple means and can also remind people of what they would be expected to do if the hazard occurs. Practical examples include: email to staff, sign on the bulletin board at a trailhead, tent-sign at a ticket booth, Twitter feed, etc.

Communication During the Event
Communication is key in any emergency situation. Poor communication will slow or even prevent response. To complicate matters further, human nature pushes people to confirm a hazard before they act. Thus it is always recommended to establish redundant communication with a consistent message. When redundancy isn’t possible, then a backup plan should be in place in case the primary method fails.

Some common alert methods include: PA systems, two-way radios, social media feeds such as Twitter, TV monitors, large scoreboards, and sirens.

How long will it take to notify people and then evacuate or seek shelter?

It is critical to determine (1) how long it takes to alert everyone and (2) how long it takes for everyone to move to shelter or evacuate. These values can be measured during a drill or estimated based on experience.

Comprehensive Event Planning Information

Appendix A, B, C of this guide
DuPage Co., IL Event Ready Toolkit: www.dupageco.org/OHSEM/ProtectDupage/58683/
FEMA training: training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-15.b
FEMA event planning: emilms.fema.gov/is15b/assets/SpecialEventsPlanning-
The Role of the Weather Watcher

A weather watcher is a trained individual that understands how to use basic weather information and monitors the weather forecast and current conditions. The purpose of the weather watcher is to maintain situational awareness and activate the events’ safety plan if needed. Because of the time and logistics required to shelter people who are unfamiliar with the event’s plan, the designated weather watcher is particularly critical to special events.

Who can be a Weather Watcher?

Anyone can be a weather watcher! It is recommended that this person complete the weather watcher tutorial which includes a video (link), Quick Start Guide and this handbook. The weather watcher should also have resources to monitor the weather. Ideally they should also have authority to activate an event’s safety plan. When this is not feasible, it is critical that the decision-maker and designated weather watcher communicate seamlessly so that dangerous delays in response do not occur.

It is also important that the role of the designated weather watcher is always filled. In other words, the responsibility is best tasked to a position rather than an individual who might not be there when the hazard strikes. It doesn’t matter as much who it is, as long as everyone knows they have responsibility for monitoring conditions.

The remainder of this guide will:

- provide background on the functions of the weather watcher
- outline a weather evaluation and monitoring process
- describe key forecast and monitoring tools

Weather Watcher Process and Resources

Weather monitoring should begin at least three days before the event begins. An effective weather watcher should:

- Understand event-specific weather thresholds and evacuation/sheltering time
- Have reliable internet access
- Have access to up-to-date radar information
- Complete the Weather Watcher Checklist
- Maintain continuous weather watch on event day (It is encouraged that they not be designated for any other responsibilities.)
- Communicate directly with incident command staff, especially when a threshold is expected to be met
- Have access to NWSChat (Request an account several weeks ahead of time) https://nwschat.weather.gov/create.php

**Weather Evaluation Basics**

For your weather evaluation to be effective, two pieces of information are vital: (1) what weather is expected and (2) which hazards are relevant to the event you are working.

**Weather Evaluation Concept**

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**Weather Watcher Checklist**

The Weather Watcher Checklist (Appendix C) will guide the Weather Watcher through the key forecast and monitoring information available to assess weather hazards. It is divided into three sections:

The *Days Leading Up to Event* section should be followed each day leading up to the event. This allows the weather watcher to develop a general understanding of potential weather hazards.

The *Day of Event* section should be utilized early on the day of the event to assess in detail the potential for weather hazards.

The *During Event* section lists information that should be monitored throughout the day of the event assess how hazards are evolving. This will aid in determining when hazards will impact the event.
In addition, The Weather Watcher Checklist is designed to be used in conjunction with the Outdoor Event Weather Watcher Briefing Page associated with your local NWS office. Links to local weather watcher pages can be found at: www.weather.gov/Lincoln/weatherwatcher Be sure to periodically refresh the Briefing Page to ensure the latest information is displayed.

**Key Weather Terms**

**Importance of Storm Speed**

Storm speed is an indicator of the potential hazards and directly affects how you should respond to the storm. As a Weather Watcher, it is critical to know how fast storms are moving when they are approaching your location.

- **Very Slow Moving Storms**
  Thunderstorms that move very slowly can lead to heavy rain and flash flooding hazards.

- **Fast Moving Storms**
  Thunderstorms that travel in excess of 50 mph have an enhanced risk of damage and injury. You must respond quickly to fast-moving storms, even when the sky is sunny. Extreme winds are possible, even before thunder is heard.

- **Time-to-Distance Calculation Tool**
  The Weather Watcher Briefing page includes a link to a calculation tool to help determine the approximate range of storms when your plan should be enacted. Form inputs include location of your event, time needed to enact your plan, and expected storm speed. Form output (distance in miles) is received via email.

**Watches vs. Warnings**

- **Advis** Hazardous weather is  
  - Take

- **Watch** At least 50% confidence  
  - Prepare for life-

- **Warni** Life-threatening  
  - Act
## Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Outlook</strong></th>
<th>Overview of expected weather. Often includes information on storm type, specific hazards, and timing.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Severe Weather Statement (SVS)</strong></td>
<td>Update on current severe storm or tornado warnings. Can be just as or more important than the initial warning. Includes expected wind speed, hail size, storm timing, etc. You can also find information about confirmed tornadoes, storm damage etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Weather Statement (SPS)</strong></td>
<td>Issued when non-severe weather may impact activities. For example, a special weather statement can be issued for minor flooding, non-severe thunderstorms, dense fog, snow, rain, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Severe Thunderstorm</strong></td>
<td>A thunderstorm that produces hail the size of 1 inch in diameter or larger and/or wind in excess of 58 MPH.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pulse storm</strong></td>
<td>Short lived storms that typically produce lightning, small hail, winds usually below 60 mph, heavy rain. On a rare occasion, produce brief, weak tornadoes and minor damage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Squall Line/QLCS/Bow Echo</strong></td>
<td>Long line of storms that cover large areas. The main hazards from these storms are damaging winds, lightning, hail, and brief tornadoes. If slow moving, heavy rain and flash flooding are also common. These storms often occur in the evening or overnight but can occur at any time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supercell</strong></td>
<td>The most severe of all thunderstorms, commonly producing damaging wind, lightning, tornadoes and very large hail. The tornadoes from supercells can be strong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MCS</strong></td>
<td>Mesoscale Convective System. Organized complex of thunderstorms that normally persists for several hours or more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flood</strong></td>
<td>Typically associated with rivers, which rise and fall more slowly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flash Flood</strong></td>
<td>Life-threatening flood that occurs quickly. Move to higher ground immediately!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instability</strong></td>
<td>The tendency for air to accelerate upward after being lifted. The greater the instability, the greater the potential for severe thunderstorms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shear</strong></td>
<td>In storm forecasting, shear is the change in wind speed and direction with height. Shear is an indication of the potential for storms to rotate. The term is also sometimes used in Doppler radar to describe changes in short horizontal distances.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Daily Assessment Phase (Before the Event)

Generally speaking the daily assessment phase is any time before an event. It is important to understand that forecasts are subject to change, and that forecast confidence typically increases as the day approaches. On the day of the event, greater confidence will allow a more detailed forecast of specific hazards and expected timing.

Below is a description of each piece of information included on the Weather Watcher Checklist that should be evaluated leading up to an event.

### Hazardous Weather Outlook

The Hazardous Weather Outlook (HWO) is issued in the early morning each day and includes detailed information about hazards for the current day and general information for the next seven days. **It is highly recommended that you read the HWO each day.**

#### Hazardous Weather Outlook Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Issuance</th>
<th>Area Covered</th>
<th>Detailed explanation of any hazardous weather expected today and tonight</th>
<th>Overview of hazardous weather expected in days 2-7</th>
<th>Spotter activation expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>425 AM CST MON MAR 15 2016</td>
<td>This hazardous weather outlook is for portions of north central Illinois, northwest Illinois, west central Illinois, northeast Iowa, southeast Iowa and northeast Missouri.</td>
<td>The main threat of severe weather will be between 3pm and 10pm CDT. Some severe storms are possible with the main threats of hail up to the size of golf balls and isolated wind gusts of 60 mph. There is also potential for isolated tornadoes, especially south of Interstate 80.</td>
<td>Thursday, winds will gust to 35 to 40 mph from the west. High profile vehicles will need to use extra caution on north-south oriented roads.</td>
<td>Spotter activation may be needed today and tonight, mainly between 3pm and 10pm CDT.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Enhanced Hazardous Weather Outlook (EHWO)
The Enhanced Hazardous Weather Outlook (EHWO) provides a color-coded, tabular overview of potential hazards. The colors in the table indicate when a hazard is possible. Green indicates no risk, then it progresses to yellow, orange, red, and purple as the risk increases. (Please note that the exact definition will change for each weather element.) Clicking on a box will show the map, so you can see how the risk for that hazard varies across the area. Updated by 5 am, 5 pm, and as needed at other times of the day.

**EHWO Example**
Weather Story

Each day your local NWS office creates a graphic that communicates the main weather impacts expected for the local area today or through a period of days.

Weather Story Example

Situation Report

When hazardous weather is likely, your local NWS office creates a printable pdf that communicates the main weather impacts in greater detail. This situation report is easily shared via email or print.

Situation Report Example
Storm Prediction Center Outlooks

The Storm Prediction Center (SPC) issues nationwide outlooks for thunderstorm and fire weather hazards. Generally, lower categories represent areas with the greatest uncertainty and smallest expected coverage of storm reports. Conversely, the higher categories represent the greatest perceived hazard, confidence, and coverage.

**SPC Outlook Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - MARGINAL (MRGL)</td>
<td>Isolated severe thunderstorms possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - SLIGHT (SLGT)</td>
<td>Scattered severe storms possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - ENHANCED (ENH)</td>
<td>Numerous severe storms possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - MODERATE (MDT)</td>
<td>Widespread severe storms likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - HIGH (HIGH)</td>
<td>Widespread severe storms expected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SPC Thunderstorm Outlook Example**

Detailed Forecast
Also known as the Point and Click Forecast, the detailed forecast is specific to the location you enter in the search box, to a 1.5 miles by 1.5 miles square area centered on that point. Temperature and precipitation chance are included out to 7 days. Wind speed and direction are shown through the next 3 days.

**Detailed Forecast Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detailed Forecast</th>
<th>Area Forecast Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detailed Forecast</td>
<td>Hourly Weather Graph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hourly Weather Graph Example</td>
<td>Area Forecast Discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Technical in nature, the Area Forecast Discussion is a scientific explanation of the reasoning behind forecast decisions. The discussion may also indicate forecaster confidence or alternative scenarios if forecast confidence is low.

**Area Forecast Discussion Example**

Area Forecast Discussion  
National Weather Service Quad Cities IA IL  
325 PM CDT Wed Jun 26 2017   

.SHORT TERM... (This Evening through Thursday)  
ISSUED AT 325 PM CDT Wed Jun 26 2017   

Tonight...The ongoing convection will look to continue to shift south and wane through 6-8 PM CDT. Then cellular CU to decay for a clear cool night with decreasing sfc winds.   

.LONG TERM... (Thursday Night through next Wednesday)  
ISSUED AT 325 PM CDT Wed Jun 26 2017   

Overview: Stormy pattern in the extended with the potential for severe weather and torrential rainfall. Will need to monitor river levels as several heavy rain events in the extended may cause significant rises.   

Friday and Friday night: Low pressure will track across MN and WI in the zonal flow. Models indicate strengthening deep layer shear with a 50 kt southwesterly low level jet and a 50 kt westerly mid level speed max. Storm relative helicity is progged at 400 m2/s2 with MUCAPEs 2500-3000 J/KG. All modes of severe weather (damaging winds, large hail and a few tornadoes) are possible. SPC day3 has a slight risk over the entire cwa, and this may be upgraded in future outlooks. What will need to be monitored is the amount of cloud cover which may impact instability and the severity of the storms. PWAT's increase to 2 inches so any storms will also dump torrential rain.   

Saturday: Weak cold front gradually settles into extreme northern MO and central IL with any thunderstorm activity in our southern cwa closer to the front. It is possible the front may hang up a bit farther north. Deep layer shear is rather weak but PWATs remain high so torrential rainfall in the stronger storms is the primary threat. However, can't rule out severe storms depending on instability.
Supplemental NWS Resources

NWSChat

NWSChat is a direct link for core partners to communicate with their local NWS office. The chat room is a venue for reporting non-life threatening conditions and to ask questions regarding the forecast. It also provides an automated feed of NWS products. The advantage of chat is that it allows people on both sides to ask questions without interrupting the other side. The disadvantage is that there may be a delays in responses, so urgent questions or information are best handled via phone call. Registration and approval are required to access NWSChat so please request an account several weeks prior to the event.

- NWSChat Bot Product Feed — NO ACCOUNT NEEDED: http://weather.im/iembot
- Request NWSChat access: https://nwschat.weather.gov/create.php
- NWSChat Live: https://nwschat.weather.gov/live (mobile friendly)
- NWSChat Live Demo: https://nwschat.weather.gov/NWSChat_Live_Demo.mp4

[23:33:23] <nwsbot> Storm Prediction Center issues Mesoscale Discussion #1176 [watch probability: 80%]
[23:36:52] <nws-zach.utter> Severe storm in northern Linn Co. near Central City has consistent rotation associated with it, tornado warning is based on the radar indicated rotation.
[23:39:18] <em-brad.a.ransford> Rotation with debris observed in Central City IA
[23:41:24] <media-justin.gehrts> looks like a wall cloud looking north on our camera
[23:41:39] <em-brad.a.ransford> Central City Fire confirms multiple funnel clouds on the ground South of central city, IA
[23:44:26] <em-brad.a.ransford> Prairieburg Fire Spotters report funnel clouds near central city heading to Prairieburg IA

[23:45:32] <nwsbot> Storm Prediction Center issues Mesoscale Discussion #1177 [watch probability: 75%]
Social Media
Local NWS forecast offices are active on Facebook and Twitter. Local NWS office social media feeds are a good way to supplement the Weather Watcher Page. If you are running an event social media feed, it can also be a good resource for information about developing hazards to share quickly with your own followers. Warning information is available via twitter but this should not be the sole feed used for warning information. It is best for the Weather Watcher to monitor local office social media feeds in conjunction with the Weather Watcher website.

Video Briefing
When certain hazardous weather criteria are met, your local office may create a recorded video briefing on the expected weather. These are short in nature and meant to provide basic information about hazardous weather. Video briefings are typically posted at the top of your local office’s homepage.

Call your local office
If all else fails, you can call your local office. On the bottom of your local office’s home page, you will find a public phone number. If you are associated with an emergency management agency, you should have a preferred contact number.

Other NWS Resources in Partnership with Local Emergency Management

Conference call
In certain circumstances, your local office may host a conference call for Emergency Managers and other core partners. These calls usually focus on the specifics of the event and provide partners an opportunity to ask questions. Contact your local emergency manager for more information about what was included a call.

Decision Support from the NWS
Core partners (usually the local emergency manager) can submit requests for the NWS to provide “heads up” phone calls and briefings for events. When your emergency manager has requested this support, the weather watcher will usually be communicating directly with the local NWS as the weather evolves. Work through your local emergency manager to ensure your event has been submitted to the NWS.
Monitoring Phase (During the Event)

Watching the weather successfully will require a few basic tools, including:

1. Computer with reliable internet access  
2. Phone to contact the NWS  
3. Communication method with key event decision makers  
4. Way to activate the weather safety plan for your event

This section describes the information that should be monitored immediately before and during your event (third section of the checklist).

Determining Storm Speed

Knowing the expected storm speed is critical to effective implementation of your plan. For example, if you know it takes 30 minutes to alert and clear your venue, and storms are moving at 60 miles an hour, you will need to activate your plan when storms are 30 miles away from the edge of your 8 mile safety radius. If the storms are moving at 30 miles an hour, you will need to activate your plan when storms are 15 miles away from the 8 mile safety radius.

Time-to-Distance Calculation Tool
The Weather Watcher Briefing page includes a link to a calculation tool to help determine the approximate range of storms when your plan should be enacted. Form inputs include location of your event, time needed to enact your plan, and expected storm speed. Form output (distance in miles) is received via email.

Options for Determining Storm Speed

Warning text: Each severe weather warning and statement includes the storm’s speed and direction of movement. For a starting point, check warnings that are nearby or upstream.

Estimate from radar: Note the begin and end time of a radar loop, then note where the storms were at the beginning and where they were at the end. Using this estimate for distance travelled, estimate where it will be in that same amount of time in the future. For example, if the loop is 60 minutes long and the storm travels 30 miles in that time, you would estimate that the storms would advance another 30 miles in the next hour.

Timing tools: Some radar apps for phone or computer include a timing tool to estimate time of arrival based on the current storm movement.
**Graphicast / Graphical NOWcast**

In cases of active weather, your local weather service office may issue a graphical short term forecast called a “Graphical Nowcast” or “Graphicast”. Typically this image will depict what is expected in the next few hours. When a Graphicast is in effect, a special image will appear in the lower left of your local office’s web page, and the graphic will display on the first tab of the weather watcher briefing page.

**Radar**

One of the best tools for observing weather for the next few hours is radar. There are many different sources for radar data, including [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov). There are also vendors that offer free or pay-for-service access to radar data. We recommend having two independent sources in case one of your options is down.

**Important Things to Remember About Radar**

1. Be sure the radar data is current. Always check the timestamp.
2. Know where you are located on the radar.
3. Some radar programs predict hail size, rotation in thunderstorms and potential tornadoes. Don’t rely on this data as it is highly prone to error.
4. Radar data does not always translate to what is actually happening at the surface. The farther you are from the radar, the larger the potential difference.
Base Reflectivity

Types of Radar Images

Base Reflectivity – Best representation of what is happening near the ground. This is the image that should be used the most.

Composite Reflectivity - Depicts the strongest part of the storm through the whole atmosphere. Can show which storm is the strongest and storm trend if viewed in a loop. Does not reliably show what is happening on the ground.

Rainfall - Radar estimates of rainfall. This data can be prone to large errors and should be used with caution. If ground gauges agree with the radar, confidence in the radar estimate is higher.

Velocity – Depicts the speed of the wind toward and away from the radar.

Using Radar to Answer Common Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where are the storms?</th>
<th>What to use</th>
<th>What to do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Base Reflectivity</td>
<td>1. Check the timestamp, is it current?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Determine where you are on the radar and where the storms are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the storms moving toward me?</td>
<td>Base Reflectivity Loop</td>
<td>1. Check the timestamp, is it current?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Determine where you are on the radar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Loop the images to determine if the storms are moving toward or away from you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When will storms reach me?</td>
<td>Base Reflectivity Loop</td>
<td>1. Check the timestamp, is it current?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Loop the radar images.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Check the begin and end time of the storms.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
loop.
4. Note where the storms were at the beginning, and where they were at the end.
5. Using this estimate for distance travelled, estimate where it will be in that same amount of time in the future.
6. For example, if the animation is 60 minutes long and the storm travels 30 miles in that time, you would estimate that the storms would advance another 30 miles in the next hour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are more storms coming?</th>
<th>Base Reflectivity (regional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Check radar from neighboring offices or a wider, regional view</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Check the timestamp, is it current?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Watch**

A watch means that conditions are becoming favorable for severe weather. This serves as your heads up to be prepared for severe weather occurring. If a watch is issued, you should:

- Begin monitoring radar and Graphical Nowcasts if not already doing so.
- Check storm speed to determine the range of storms when sheltering would be needed.
- Check your event’s severe weather plan for potential actions, such as notifying staff, unlocking buildings, updating public displays, posting on social media, etc.

**Watch Example**

URGENT - IMMEDIATE BROADCAST REQUESTED
Severe Thunderstorm Watch Number 489
NWS Storm Prediction Center Norman OK
120 AM CDT Wed Sep 20 2017

The NWS Storm Prediction Center has issued a

* Severe Thunderstorm Watch for portions of East-central Minnesota Northwest Wisconsin

* Effective this Wednesday from 120 AM until 500 AM CDT.

* Primary hazards include...
  Isolated damaging wind gusts to 70 mph
  Isolated large hail to 1 inch in diameter
SUMMARY...Line of strong to severe storms will progress east across the Saint Croix Valley, likely weakening towards daybreak.

The watch area is approximately along and 55 miles east and west of a line from 20 miles north of Duluth MN to 5 miles east of St. Paul MN. For a complete depiction see the associated watch outline update (WOUS64 KWNS WOU9).

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

REMEMBER...A Severe Thunderstorm Watch means conditions are favorable for severe thunderstorms in and close to the watch area. Persons in these areas should be on the lookout for hazardening weather conditions and listen for later statements and possible warnings. Severe thunderstorms can and occasionally do produce tornadoes.

Warning

Important note: Warnings issued which include the event location likely do not provide enough lead time to be used as a trigger for executing evacuation/shelter plans. Warnings issued upstream of the area can be useful in helping gauge the movement of storms and help determine when your event may be impacted.

Warnings indicate that life-threatening weather is imminent. It is recommended to view the warning in both text and graphic formats. The graphic (example at right) shows at a glance the area included in the warning.

The text describes the magnitude and timing of the hazards.

Warning Example

Tornado Warning
National Weather Service Quad Cities IA/IL
723 PM CDT FRI JUL 21 2017

The National Weather Service has issued a

* Tornado Warning for...
  Eastern Whiteside County in Illinois...

* Until 745 PM CDT

* At 723 PM CDT, a tornado was reported near Fulton, moving east at 40 mph.
HAZARD...Tornado.
SOURCE...Radar indicated rotation.
IMPACT...Flying debris will be dangerous to those caught without shelter. Mobile homes will be destroyed.
* This dangerous storm will be near...
  Morrison around 7:35 PM CDT.

Other locations impacted by this tornadic thunderstorm include Unionville and Morrison-Rockwood State Park.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

TAKE COVER NOW! Move to a basement or an interior room on the lowest floor of a sturdy building.

LAT...LON 4180 8984 4183 9018 4185 9018 4185 9017
TIME...MOT...LOC 0023Z 255DEG 34KT 4189 9012

TORNADO...RADAR INDICATED
HAIL...1.75IN

Severe Weather Statement

A severe weather statement can be as important as the initial warning. Severe Weather Statements provide continuing information during a Tornado Warning or Severe Thunderstorm Warning, and provide the latest information on a storm’s strength, location, and movement.

Severe Weather Statement Example

Severe Weather Statement
National Weather Service Quad Cities IA/IL
701 PM CDT WED SEP 20 2017

IAC045-163-210030-
//.CON.KDYN.SV.W.0189.000000T0000Z-170921T0030Z/
Scott IA-Clinton IA-
701 PM CDT WED SEP 20 2017

...A SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL 7:30 PM CDT FOR SCOTT AND CLINTON COUNTIES...

At 7:00 PM CDT, a severe thunderstorm was located near Donahue, or 8 miles northeast of Durant, moving east at 20 mph.

HAZARD...60 mph wind gusts and quarter size hail.
SOURCE...Radar indicated.
IMPACT...Hail damage to vehicles is expected. Expect wind damage to roofs, siding, and trees.
Locations impacted include...
Eldridge, DeWitt, Walcott, Long Grove, Grand Mound, Sherman Park, Clinton County Fairgrounds, Scott County Park and Plainview.

This includes Interstate 80 in Iowa between mile markers 280 and 284.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

Continuous cloud to ground lightning is occurring with this storm. Move indoors immediately. Remember, if you can hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck by lightning.

LAT...LON 4167 9042 4160 9087 4171 9087 4174 9082
TIME...MOT...LOC 0000Z 25 2DEG 18KT 4168 9077

HAIL...1.00IN
WIND...60MPH

Supplemental Information

Special Weather Statement
Special Weather Statements are issued for thunderstorms, wind, floods, winter weather, and other phenomenon that do not meet warning levels.

Special Weather Statement Example
Special Weather Statement
National Weather Service Quad Cities IA/IL
834 PM CDT WED JUL 19 2017

ILC011-155-200200-
Putnam-Bureau-
834 PM CDT WED JUL 19 2017

...A STRONG THUNDERSTORM WILL AFFECT EASTERN PUTNAM AND EASTERN BUREAU COUNTIES UNTIL 900 PM CDT...

At 832 PM CDT, a strong thunderstorm was located near Amboy, or 8 miles east of Walton, moving southeast at 60 mph.

Wind gusts up to 50 mph are possible with this storm well out ahead of the storm, and any rainfall associated with it.
Locations impacted include...
Spring Valley, DePue, Granville, Ladd, La Moille, Dalzell, McNabb, Mark, Ohio and Orin.

This includes Interstate 80 in Illinois between mile markers 63 and 72.

LAT...LON 4159 8948 4158 8917 4111 8916
TIME...MOT...LOC 0132Z 314DEG 51KT 4169 8928

Lightning Data
There are two types of lightning strikes: those that touch the ground and those that don’t. Private vendors offer options for monitoring lightning data for a fee.

Things to remember about lightning:
▪ All thunderstorms produce lightning and are a threat to anyone outside.
▪ Warnings are not issued for lightning. If lightning is occurring within 8 miles, people should move indoors.
▪ If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck by lightning.
▪ Lightning can occur when it is not raining.
▪ In fast moving storms, lightning and wind may arrive before thunder is heard.
Appendix A: Weather Considerations for Outdoor Events

Designate shelter areas if available
No one is safe outside of a solid enclosed structure during any thunderstorm; tents and pavilions are not suitable shelters.

Establish weather thresholds to prompt activation of sheltering / evacuation plan
Examples/suggestions:
- Thunderstorms (lightning) within 8 mile radius
- Calculate sheltering/evacuation time utilizing 3 step decision guide
- Heat index of 95 degrees
- Non-thunderstorm wind gusts exceeding 45 mph

Designate a Weather Watcher
An effective weather watcher should:
- Understand event-specific weather thresholds and evacuation/sheltering time
- Have reliable internet access
- Have access to up-to-date radar information
- Complete the Weather Watcher Training Module and Checklist
- Maintain continuous weather watch on event day (It is encouraged that they not be designated for any other responsibilities.)
- Communicate directly with incident command staff, especially when a threshold is expected to be met
- Have access to NWSChat (Request an account several weeks ahead of time) https://nwschat.weather.gov/create.php
- Be aware of the basic suite of weather information available

Relay weather information ahead of potential hazardous weather
Examples/suggestions:
- General severe weather risk
- Severe Thunderstorm Watches or Tornado Watches
- Prior to possible evacuation, reminding what the evacuation plan is and where storm shelters are.
Appendix B: Time to Shelter

It is suggested that the total time to evacuate and/or shelter be calculated before the event begins. There are three key components to the total time:

1. Alert and Activation Time - the time needed to mobilize staff and facility to conduct evacuation/sheltering and the time needed to make notify patrons.
2. Evacuation/Shelter Time - The time needed for movement of patrons once the evacuation/sheltering begins.
3. 25% Safety Factor - Combine the Alert and Activation Time with the Evacuation/Shelter Time and multiply by 1.25. This allows for unexpected delays in the movement of patrons, changes in storm arrival time and other unforeseen circumstances.

\[
(\text{Alert and Activation Time (min)} + \text{Evacuation or Shelter Time (min)}) \times 1.25 = \text{Total Time Needed (Minutes)}
\]

How much time do you need to shelter?
This guide can be used by the weather watcher to track the predetermined time for evacuation/shelter and the current position and speed of approaching storms to determine when the plan needs to be enacted. A video tutorial on this chart can be found on the Planning and Resources Tab of the weather watcher website.
Appendix C: Weather Watcher Checklist

Days Leading Up To Event:
_____ Hazardous Weather Outlook
_____ EHWO
_____ Weather Story Graphic
_____ Situation Report (if available)
_____ SPC Outlooks
_____ Detailed Forecast and Hourly Weather Graph (enter location)

Day of Event:  Storm Speed: _______ Storm Direction:_______
_____ Hazardous Weather Outlook including forecast storm motion
_____ EHWO
_____ Weather Story Graphic
_____ Situation Report (if available)
_____ SPC Day 1 Outlook
_____ Detailed Forecast and Hourly Weather Graph (enter location)
_____ Area Forecast Discussion
_____ Was an NWS conference call scheduled or briefing slides sent?

During Event  Storm Speed: _______ Storm Direction:_______
_____ Radar (various sources)
_____ Graphical NOWcasts
_____ Watches and Warnings (enter location)
_____ Detailed Forecast and Hourly Weather Graph (enter location)
_____ NWSChat (https://nwschat.weather.gov/live/)

Weather Watcher Notes
Timing:

Hazards:

Impacts: