



# Aware

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## NWS to Implement Changes to Flash Flood Wireless Emergency Alerts

By [Kate Abshire](#), Hydrologist, NWS, Water Resources Services Branch

Beginning on January 8, 2020, (or the next day without critical weather) the NWS only will issue Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) for Flash Flood Warnings (FFW) based on two damage threat tags: Considerable or Catastrophic. These WEAs will be sent using the new 90-character messaging. FFWs labeled with these tags are life-threatening and require urgent action. Because these tags are applied to FFWs relatively rarely, this change will reduce the number of flood-related WEAs NWS sends. NWS will also issue WEAs for Flash Flood Statements that exhibit an increase in damage threat.

This change will not affect key information in the FFW segment header block, such as the Valid Time Event Code (VTEC) and Hydrologic VTEC (H-VTEC) strings, nor will it affect changes to the existing criteria for warning dissemination.

NWS will still issue and distribute all FFWs via NOAA Weather Radio, the Emergency Alert System, on radio and TV broadcasts, weather.gov and through dissemination systems to emergency managers and partners.

Users can find information about the specific changes to WEA Messages for FFWs in the [Product Description Document \(PDD\)](#). The PDD also includes more details on the characterization of the flash flood damage threat, source information and causative event, along with examples of FFWs in Impact-Based Warnings format.

In addition, NWS has solicited public feedback on a proposed expansion of weather warnings to the new 360-character maximum and the proposed content of the NWS messages carried by WEA in English and Spanish. Based on the positive feedback received, we have now finalized those types of messages.

Look for another article in *Aware* or on [Service Change Notice web page](#) once NWS has set an implementation date for 360-character FFW WEA messages in English and Spanish.



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## Experimental Winter Storm Outlook Product Release

For more info, contact [Mike Muccilli](#), NWS Winter Weather Service Expert, Silver Spring, MD

The path to improved forecast accuracy, consistency and ultimately our improved Impact-Based Decision Support Services (IDSS), spans all seasons. This winter, the NWS will be presenting the experimental Winter Storm Outlook (WSO) product on its public facing web pages. Although the experimental WSO is not specifically an IDSS product, it is a great step forward in improving forecast consistency and communicating to the public.

The experimental WSO uses Weather Forecast Office (WFO)-specific watch/warning criteria for hazardous snow/ice accumulation to present the probability of a winter weather event exceeding those criteria over the next 3 days. The result is a collaborative winter weather outlook product on a national scale.

The experimental WSO is a cooperative effort between the NWS Weather Prediction Center and WFO forecasters, representing an evolution of the Winter Weather Watch Collaborator originally developed in 2014. The experimental WSO will lead to greater consistency in the issuance of Winter Storm Watches and unified messaging ahead of significant winter storms. In addition, the experimental WSO is another step towards the NWS goal of improving collaborative and probabilistic winter forecast products.



The product launched internally for all continental U.S. WFOs on October 1, 2018. The experimental WSO grids provide forecasters with probabilistic information to aid in winter storm watch decision-making.

Starting on (or about) December 16, 2019, the WSO will be a public-facing experimental product, open for comment from WPC’s Winter Weather home page.

To learn more, listen to the [short webinar](#) to learn how the experimental WSO fits into the broader objectives of the Winter Service Program.

## How NWS Kept 93<sup>rd</sup> Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade Afloat

By Meteorologist [Da’Vel Johnson](#) and [Dave Radell](#) Science and Operations Officer NWS New York, NY

Balloons were once again flying during annual Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade thanks in part to crucial onsite Impact-based Decision Support Services provided by NWS New York City for local emergency managers. When this annual parade started in 1924 it featured live animals from the Central Park Zoo. In 1927, the trademark balloons replaced the animals in the interest of safety.

With an estimated crowd of 3.5 million attendees and numerous spectators around the globe, it is one of New York City’s largest holiday events. NWS New York has provided onsite IDSS in support of the parade annually since 2010 and remote support since 1998, the year after high winds caused some balloons to float erratically along the parade route, resulting in injuries to attendees.



NWS New York Meteorologists Da’Vel Johnson, left, and David Wally, right, provide an IDSS Weather Briefing at the Incident Command Post in Manhattan just before the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Wind and wind gust forecasts were critical to deciding whether to fly the balloons this year. Starting the week before the event, NWS New York sent email updates and provided daily phone briefings to NYC Office of Emergency Management (NYCOEM), alerting the office to the potential for high winds the morning of the parade related to an approaching cold front. On Thanksgiving Day, NWS New York forecast operations were fully staffed in support of the two meteorologist onsite at the incident command post in Manhattan.

Responding to the forecast and IDSS provided by NWS New York, the balloons did fly but were lowered from the normal height of 55 feet above the ground to right above ground level for safety purposes. This allowed the parade to continue without major incident.

NOAA’s Rear Admiral Gallaudet commented, “... *The safety of tens of millions of citizens, and protection of property values in the hundreds of billions of dollars are in your hands. Commanding Officers of US Navy aircraft carriers do not even have that level of responsibility. David and Da’Vel [NWS meteorologists], I greatly appreciate your vigilance and expert attention to detail in supporting the Macy’s Thanksgiving parade. I watched those balloons test their handlers, and there is no doubt that your presence and accuracy prevented many injuries from occurring.*

**Aware**

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