SKYWARN STORM SPOTTERS

SKYWARN is a national network of volunteer severe weather spotters. There are currently over 230,000 trained SKYWARN spotters in the U.S. These dedicated citizens come from all walks of life and help keep their local communities safe by conveying severe weather reports to NOAA's National Weather Service (NWS). They are trained by local NWS meteorologists on how to safely observe severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, hail, flooding, heavy snow, and ice accumulation. Where appropriate, training is received on other hazardous phenomena such as volcanic ashfall, waterspouts, rip currents, mudslides, and even earthquakes.

Since the program's inception in the early 1970s, the information provided by SKYWARN spotters, has enabled the NWS to issue more timely and accurate life saving severe weather warnings. Radar may tell us that heavy snow is falling, but it can not tell us how much snow is on the ground or if rain is mixing with the snow. Spotters provide the real time "ground-truth" necessary for an effective national warning system. Reports are used by NWS forecasters to send out public statements, warnings and advisories, and short-term forecasts. These products reach the public through the internet, NOAA Weather Radio (www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr), the media and other commercial services. SKYWARN spotter reports also go into *Storm Data*, which is an official publication that documents severe weather across the country. *Storm Data* can be used to create a severe weather climatology (or history) of a local county or city. Storm Data is published by the National Climatic Data Center.

In the average year, 10,000 severe thunderstorms, 5,000 floods, and over 1,000 tornadoes occur across the United States. These storms have killed many people in the U.S. and injured numerous others. A major lesson learned from recent disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, is that it is every organizations' responsibility to develop an emergency response plan. Any solid response plan has a section that deals with severe weather hazards and should identify *Designated Weather Watchers*. These individuals remain aware of weather conditions on the behalf of others, so they can go about their business. When conditions become potentially hazardous, the Designated Weather Watcher heightens his or her weather monitoring activities to remain cognizant of the threat to their specific location. In addition, they know how to initiate a local warning action to influence the actions of others when there is a developing weather emergency.   Having a Designated Weather Watcher as part of organizational plans is not only important in terms of safety, it makes good business sense. The training provided to become a SKYWARN spotter can also be used to qualify a Designated Weather Watcher in your organization.

How can I get involved?

Every year the NWS conducts SKYWARN spotter training sessions. The NWS currently has 122 Weather Forecast Office's across the nation, each with a *Warning Coordination Meteorologist (WCM)*, who is responsible for administering the SKYWARN program in their local area. There is no charge and a typical class takes about 2 hours to conduct. To find out when a SKYWARN spotter class will be conducted in local your area, please contact your local Warning Coordination Meteorologist at: www.stormready.noaa.gov/contact.htm

SKYWARN storm spotters form the Nation's first line of defense against severe weather.   The efforts of these unsung heroes give communities throughout our country the precious gift of time – the seconds and minutes that can help save lives.   For more about the SKYWARN program, visit the NWS National SKYWARN web page at www.weather.gov/skywarn