

COVERING THE STORM: BROADCASTING FROM THE NWS STORM PREDICTION CENTER AND OTHER NATIONAL CENTERS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Storm Prediction Center (SPC) in Norman, OK, is the best source for severe weather and tornado forecasting experts, as well as information about tornado outbreaks from a national perspective. The SPC is responsible for short-term hazardous weather forecasting across the contiguous United States. The Center exists solely to protect the life and property of the American people through the issuance of timely, accurate watch and forecast products dealing with tornadoes and other mesoscale hazardous weather. The SPC coordinates with National Weather Service field offices around the country and provides short-term guidance of hazardous and economically-disruptive weather events such as thunderstorms, tornadoes, winter storms, blizzards, freezing precipitation, flash floods, and fire weather.

2. WHO CALLS THE SPC?

Numerous national and international news organizations have called on the Storm Prediction Center during the past few years. Examples include all three network evening news programs and the Today Show; cable channels such as CNN, The Weather Channel, the Discovery Channel, National Geographic Television; international broadcasters including the BBC, CBC, and Japan TV; as well as regional and local television, radio and newspapers.

3. WHAT INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE?

Reporters from these organizations call the Storm Prediction Center when they need information about tornadoes—from an outbreak that has just occurred to historical stories. The SPC provided important information during the record-breaking week of tornadoes across the

Midwest that occurred May 4—11, 2003, as well as following the May 3, 1999, tornado outbreak in Oklahoma and Kansas. More recently, SPC meteorologists discussed record numbers of tornadoes related to tropical weather in August and September 2004.

This year, the good news has been no deaths in the U.S. from tornadoes since March—a first since the National Weather Service began keeping records in 1950. The hardest question to answer is always “why no tornadoes?”

4. INTERVIEWS

A technical-looking area of the Storm Prediction Center is available for reporters to conduct interviews with forecasters and the director. Typically, following an interview, crews shoot b-roll of forecasters at work in the operations area and daily map discussions between SPC forecasters and researchers from the NOAA National Severe Storms Laboratory, located in the same building.

If a crew is not able to fly into Oklahoma City, freelance crews are available for hire and many are familiar with the SPC. Another option for live or taped interviews is a satellite link on the University of Oklahoma campus in Norman or at a local television affiliate in Oklahoma City, just 30 minutes away. SPC meteorologists are also available for over-the-air phone interviews in the heat of the moment.

5. WHY CALL THE SPC?

The Storm Prediction Center is the best source for severe weather and tornado experts who can provide the big picture and information after tornado outbreaks throughout the United States. When SPC forecasters issue a moderate risk for severe weather in their Day 2 Convective Outlook, reporters have an opportunity to share the forecast with the area that could be affected the next day, as well as during the next day's morning programs. The media are important partners helping the Storm Prediction Center, National Weather Service, and NOAA achieve their core missions.

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6. MORE ABOUT THE SPC

Every tornado and severe thunderstorm watch issued in the United States originates at the SPC. Part of the NWS National Centers for Environmental Prediction, the SPC is the primary center of expertise for forecasting short-term hazardous weather events and is world-renowned for its excellence in forecasting exceptionally severe and/or long-lived thunderstorms. The Center makes maximum use of observations, numerical forecast models, Doppler radar, geostationary satellites, and the latest science and technology in generating their forecasts.

In addition to working with field offices and other national centers within the NWS, the SPC collaborates with local, national and international communities, as well as various NOAA agencies and academia. This collaboration increases the understanding of hazardous weather environments across the United States, and promotes the infusion of new science and technology into the SPC's operation.

The Storm Prediction Center's guidance is used by numerous agencies to enhance the protection of life and property, including severe thunderstorm forecasts out to three days in advance and short-term tornado and severe thunderstorm watches. By providing timely and accurate guidance, the SPC enhances the level of products and services the NWS issues to the public and helps the NWS offices effectively accomplish their public safety responsibilities.

The SPC is the nation's only all-hazards weather forecast center. Its forecasters deal with hazardous weather 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The SPC maintains a continuous weather watch over the entire contiguous 48 states, and issues most of its products on an as-needed,

event-driven basis. The SPC provides its partners and customers a one-stop source of mesoscale meteorological information. SPC products are available on the World Wide Web and are commonly used by local National Weather Service offices, emergency managers, TV and radio meteorologists, private weather forecasting companies, the aviation industry, storm spotters, agriculture, educational institutions, and many other groups.

The SPC's very specialized mission requires meteorologists with a high level of expertise in convective storm forecasting, as well as excessive precipitation, winter weather, and conditions leading to high fire dangers. The SPC staff is active in scientific research involving severe and dangerous weather. Four staff members have Doctor of Philosophy degrees in meteorology, and the entire forecast and technical staff has at least a Bachelor of Science degree. Most of the forecasters at the Center have at least five years of specialized experience, with the veteran forecasters having more than 30 years of severe storm forecasting. The SPC has participated in several major scientific experiments and field programs in recent years, including the V.O.R.T.E.X. Project. Several SPC meteorologists make severe storms their hobby as well, and are heavily involved with storm spotting and storm chasing on their own time.

The Center was established in Washington, D.C., in 1952, moved to Kansas City in 1954, and then to Norman in 1997. It is now collocated with the NOAA National Severe Storms Laboratory.

For more information about the Storm Prediction Center or to set up an interview, contact 405.579.0771 or visit www.spc.noaa.gov.