

National Weather Service (NWS) Service Description Document (SDD)
May 2013
Proposed Enhanced Impact-Based Decision Support Services for the Emergency Management Community Supporting Events/Incidents Impacting Safety of Life and Property

A. Service Description:

The [National Weather Service Roadmap 2.0](#) is focused on Building a Weather-Ready Nation, which means building community resilience in the face of increasing vulnerability to extreme weather-dependent¹ impacts. To this end, NOAA's National Weather Service (NWS) is enhancing decision support services, improving technology to track and forecast storms, and expanding its dissemination efforts to achieve far-reaching national preparedness. This enhanced, multi-disciplinary approach will empower emergency management, first responders, government officials, businesses, and ultimately the public to make fast, smart decisions to save lives and livelihoods.

This Service Description Document describes NWS's impact-based decision support services (IDSS) provided for the protection of life and property to officials that serve within Emergency Support Functions as outlined in the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) National Response Framework (see Section B, below). NWS defines IDSS as provision of relevant information and interpretative services to enable core partners' decisions when weather, water, or climate has a direct impact on the protection of lives and livelihoods (see NWS Weather-Ready Nation Roadmap at http://www.nws.noaa.gov/com/weatherreadynation/files/nws_wrn_roadmap_final_april17.pdf).

This SDD provides details on who will be supported and for what purposes. The services described herein apply to all local NWS offices and NCEP Service Centers (hereafter "NWS offices"), as all NWS offices have always provided decision support to the emergency management community within the context of our mission to protect life and property. To implement our WRN Roadmap, focused IDSS activities are currently taking place at several offices participating in NWS's WRN Pilot Projects (http://weather.gov/com/weatherreadynation/files/WRN_Pilot_Projects_Final.pdf); however, through ongoing prototype activities, many other offices across NWS are exploring new ways of providing decision support services. This SDD describes how NWS will incorporate best practices from these prototype activities into our support for the emergency management community across NWS.

B. Who Will be Supported:

NWS will provide the services described in Part C to members of the emergency management community. As described in the DHS [National Response Framework](#) (NRF), this includes

¹ Within this document, the term "weather-dependent" is used generally to mean all hydrometeorological and related service areas which the NWS supports (e.g., including tsunamis, space weather, etc.).

“emergency management practitioners, community leaders, and government officials who must collectively understand and assess the needs of their respective communities and organizations and determine the best ways to organize and strengthen their resiliency.” The NRF is an essential component of the national preparedness system mandated in Presidential Policy Directive (PPD) 8.

The emergency management community is a key component described in the NWS definition of “core partners²” and this component is described as:

public safety officials who serve as employees or contract agents of a government agency at the federal, state, local, or tribal level and are charged with protecting the public from hazards that are influenced by weather or weather-related events. Other members of this community include: safety and emergency personnel, from universities or other large entities with large populations whose roles are functionally equivalent to the public safety officials.

IDSS for the emergency management community includes entities that may be engaged to resource any NRF-identified Emergency Support Functions (ESF)³.

C. Type of Support Provided: Protection of Life and Property

NWS Impact-based Decision Support Services will be provided to support decision making by the emergency management community before, during, and after events and incidents which are caused by or impacted by conditions for which NWS provides information services.

The capacity of NWS to provide support to the emergency response community depends on the type of IDSS provided.

1. Type 1 – Direct, interactive, support for members of the emergency management community. This type of support requires a high level of interaction between the decision-maker and NWS staff, to ensure safety of lives and property and is the most resource intensive service for NWS. NWS will provide this support for all members of the emergency management community, as described above.

At times, NWS may be asked to provide services to additional entities that don’t fall under the description of emergency management community, above, but whose capacity to operate immediately impacts public safety (e.g., hospital staff, public utilities). Within the context of the Incident Command System (e.g., an Emergency Operations Center), these services will be provided to all who are related to any of the defined ESFs that make up a community response to an event/incident where lives or property are at risk. Requests to NWS for direct services for these entities, outside the context of the Incident Command System (ICS) will be addressed in partnership with a cognizant member of the emergency management community (as described above).

² The definition of “core partner” can be found in Appendix A of [NWSI 1-1003](#).

³ These emergency support functions, as defined by FEMA’s National Response Framework, include transportation, communication, public works and engineering, firefighting, information and planning, logistics management, public health and medical services, search and rescue, oil and hazardous materials response, agriculture and natural resources, energy, public safety and security, long-term community recovery, and external affairs.

2. Type 2– Coordination activities supporting high-impact events aimed at the emergency management community. This type of support is provided by NWS to multiple (if not many) members of the emergency management community simultaneously, often in the form of a briefing or webinar. While interaction with NWS staff is possible, the capability to directly address a specific decision-maker’s needs is limited.

When essential for protection of life and property and to ensure consistent communication among all emergency management entities, Type 2 IDSS participants may be expanded beyond the emergency management community itself as needed for specific events (e.g., hospital staff, public utilities). When offering Type 2 IDSS, NWS will consider requests from authorized Type 1 IDSS participants for expanded participation to be authoritative.

3. Type 3 - Common services – Routine provision of NWS data/products including alerts of hazardous weather conditions that are provided uniformly to everyone (including the emergency management community)⁴. These data/products are a valuable source of information in weather-related decision making. They are also the foundation for services provided by the media to inform the public and for diverse services of the weather industry to aid their client’s decision making through the entire US economy.

NWS aims to provide an equitable level of support to all such entities in the group described in Section B. However, local office management will have the discretion to evaluate resources to determine how to most effectively support multiple requests for support, especially during large-scale events with wide-spread impact.

NWS recognizes that our partners in America's Weather Industry may also provide specialized weather support to the emergency management community. NWS personnel will work with the firms from America's Weather Industry chosen by members of the emergency management community to provide an appropriate level of decision support services to ensure the protection of life and property.

D. Request for Type 1 Support

Each NWS office will maintain a record of organizations afforded Type 1 decision support services for the emergency management community. To do this, NWS will carry out the following:

Step 1- Current IDSS Customers

NWS offices have a long history of providing mission-critical decision support services to the emergency management community in their area of responsibility. These well-established IDSS relationships with existing members of the emergency management community should be documented by the NWS office providing the support, but do not require a new request to continue Type 1 IDSS service.

⁴ Proposed changes to Level 3 data/products are not covered by this SDD. Individual changes to our data/products will continue to be open for public comment/review as they are proposed.

Step 2 – New IDSS Customers

As NWS continues its efforts to improve DSS, there is a reasonable expectation that additional organizations will request these services. These requests will be processed in the following manner:

- a) Any organization may request Type 1 IDSS from their local/regional/national NWS office by describing how they meet the criteria above. (**Note:** This is a request to be included as an organization receiving Direct IDSS from NWS when conditions warrant. **No additional request/approval is needed for actual support for a particular event/incident.**)
- b) The reply decision (decisions on requests made in conjunction with regional/national offices) to accept or deny providing Type 1 IDSS will be provided within 30 days upon receipt of user request.
- c) If participation is denied, the office will provide justification to the requestor in the form of an email.
- d) Denied requests may be appealed through the respective NWS Regional/NCEP Headquarters; the Regional/NCEP Headquarters are to coordinate with the field office/NCEP Center and requesting organization prior to reaching a decision.
- e) If the appeal is denied at Regional/NCEP Headquarters, a final appeal may be made through NWS Headquarters. NWS Headquarters will coordinate disposition of appeals with the Regional/NCEP Headquarters, field office/NCEP Center, and requesting organization prior to reaching a decision. NWS processing of each appeal is not to exceed 45 days from the date of appeal.

NWS may occasionally review the group of organizations supported and/or refine the definition of emergency management community provided above.

E. Presentation Format:

As resources permit, NWS will provide members of the emergency management community with any relevant NWS information needed by the entity being served in whatever format is most useful. In addition to using existing NWS products/services, the office providing support may choose to use new forms or formats of services and delivery mechanisms to best serve a specific event/incident, within the bounds of current NWS policy.

NWS personnel providing IDSS will be subject matter experts in the relevant conditions being addressed, be familiar with users' needs and all relevant NWS product content and interpretation, and will coordinate with other NWS offices and National Centers to ensure a consistent NWS message.

Support may be provided either on-site (e.g., at an ICS command location) or remotely, depending on the nature of the event/incident and available resources. Remote support may be provided by the most appropriate means available, including, but not limited to, telephone, email, chat, on-line briefings/webinars, recorded briefings, live 2-way briefings, social media, etc.

F. Change in Service:

NWS has always recognized that we have a special mission responsibility for our core partners and have provided decision support services to the emergency response community, both remotely (telephone, conferences) and on-site. What has changed with the new NWS Strategic Plan is the recognition of IDSS as a primary role of NWS, with a greater attention to the skills, training, and operational procedures needed to fully and more effectively support this type of service.

The [NWS WRN Roadmap](#) describes details of NWS's intent to provide enhanced IDSS to the emergency management community for protection of life and property. NWS is developing an impacts catalog to better understand and document key critical thresholds important to core partners. We are also developing highly trained Emergency Response Specialists to focus on the IDSS role. NWS is also committed to using whatever technologies and display formats are necessary to communicate critical weather information to emergency management personnel.

G. Emergency Conditions:

If lives and property are immediately at risk, Type 1 IDSS may be provided to individuals/organizations without a previous request/approval being in place. For example, in the event of an immediate threat, direct notification by NWS about the threat may be initiated. If the NWS provider of Direct IDSS has a reasonable expectation of providing future Type 1 services to the individual/organization, then request and approval for future services will be obtained after the emergency situation has passed.

H. Feedback Method:

Comments may be provided by August 23, 2013, to nws.idss.comments@noaa.gov.