

COMMUNICATION, PUBLIC EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

PWS-SG 2

This summary guide is for managers of forecast operations of National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs). It is designed to help you make your services understood by the public, and to engage with the community so that they better understand what you do.



Why communication and public education and outreach activities?

These activities:

Benefit the community: Weather forecasts and warnings only have value when users understand and use them. A forecast could be accurate, but if it is not understood or used by its recipient, then it gives little benefit.

Improve delivery of services to users: When users understand how to use the services provided, they are able to assess and provide useful feedback on what aspects of the service are working well and what needs improvement. NMHSs that have good outreach programmes will have effective means for nurturing this dialogue with the communities they serve.

Benefit the NMHS: People have high regard for easily understood and useful services. This helps the credibility of the NMHS and raises its profile with the public, media, partner agencies and government.

How to conduct public education and outreach effectively

Engage specific users and interest groups: Farmers, fishermen, emergency managers, Meteorological Societies, health agencies, schools and universities and many other users, all have high awareness of the weather and can be good judges of a forecast's accuracy and timeliness – this is useful information to have. Meet with them regularly. As the relationship develops, both users and providers of the information will gain benefit. Knowledge and respect for what you do will grow, and users will tell others about the valuable

services you offer. Eventually, they may become your most powerful advocates especially in difficult times. Multi-disciplinary cooperation and the sharing of knowledge and experiences also distribute costs and minimize the occurrence of conflicting information from different sources.

Maintain a campaign of regular public communication: Media releases are a good way of drawing attention to upcoming severe weather. But save them for the big events – otherwise people may stop taking notice. Other good topics for media releases are weather for an upcoming major event or public holiday, a launch of a new service, interesting recent events (why so cold? ... wet? ... dry?). Maintain a web blog that is informative, enjoyable to read, topical, well-researched, updated regularly (at least weekly) and authoritative. Some of your staff, even those who are quite junior, may enjoy doing this.

Equip your staff with the ability to engage with the public and key users. Ensure that the NMHS staff who are communicating with the user community appreciate the importance of having a good working relationship. Make sure that they have the necessary social and communication skills to work effectively with key stakeholders, and that they are fully aware of the official NMHS policies. This will involve training the staff.

Use all available technology: Exploit technology to establish cost-effective and appropriate communication channels. For example, the Radio Internet (RANET) communication initiative has proven very effective in delivering Public Weather Services to vulnerable rural and remote communities. It has also led to strong collaborative relationships between NMHSs, NGOs,

local communities and other key stakeholders. Mobile telephony is the most rapidly adopted and popular communication technology in history. SMS messaging is a fast and cost-effective way of communicating warnings to a large number of people.

Be creative: In many countries, public education campaigns have effectively used artistic media such as

arts, theatre and dance. People have been telling their stories this way for millennia. Form partnerships with community arts groups to explore ways of telling people about weather or climate.

Positively influencing how people regard your services may require a change of approach by the NMHS and it does not necessarily cost a lot of money.

Blog entry by Meteorological Service of New Zealand Limited Wellington Rainbow Written by: Chris Noble on 2 November 2009 (10 Comments)

With a superb view over Wellington and the harbour from the MetService building in Kelburn, we're often (and quite appropriately) treated to some fantastic weather related vistas. Here's a little sample, snapped on Monday, 26 October 2009, as a few light showers passed over the city in a northerly flow late afternoon.



The view here is looking east, and with a clear western horizon behind us the sun angle was just right for some rainbow spotting over the city. The main rainbow, caused by a double refraction and single reflection of sunlight by raindrops, is clearly visible. If you squint hard enough towards the upper left of the image you might just make out the fainter secondary bow (resulting from two reflections of sunlight inside the raindrops).

For more information about the technical side of rainbows and how they are formed, head over to the Rainbow article at Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow>).

Note: This summary guide is based on the "Guidelines on Public Weather Services Strategy for Developing Public Education and Outreach" (WMO/TD-No. 1354) - Available at www.wmo.int/pws