

Edmond Fitzgerald sinking recreated

November 11 2005

University of Wisconsin-Madison scientists say they've created a simulation of the 1975 Lake Superior storm that sank the ore carrier Edmond Fitzgerald.

On Nov. 10, 1975, Lake Superior swallowed the Edmond Fitzgerald, along with her 29 crewmembers and cargo of nearly 26,000 tons of ore. The incident evolved into a Midwestern legend and at least one song.

Robert Aune, a scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, has created a simulation of that storm.

Satellite technology was new in 1975, so Aune obtained conventional observations from the National Center for Environmental Prediction and the National Center for Atmospheric Research that uses modern techniques and technology to re-analyze weather data from 1949 through the present.

Aune plugged the re-analyzed data into a model that uses atmospheric observations to produce weather forecasts.

"Running retrospective cases like this -- especially on extreme events -- is a good exercise to see if we can reproduce features of a particular storm that happened years ago," he said.

Aune's case study will be used to teach fundamental winter storm dynamics in a basic meteorology course at the university.

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