

National Weather Service tests new, simpler winter hazard communications: Public invited to comment during test period

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NOAA's National Weather Service is testing new language to communicate winter weather hazards in its forecasts. From now through March 31, 2013, alternative messages in winter hazard forecasts will run on a [test website](#) for 26 weather forecast offices throughout the country.

Currently the National Weather Service issues [14 different types](#) of winter hazard forecasts. Customer satisfaction surveys and agency service assessments have revealed that some of the public may not be able to distinguish between a watch, an advisory, or a warning. The test proposes a [new set of terms](#) that replace watches and advisories while clarifying language used in warnings.

"The National Weather Service provides outstanding forecasts and life-saving information, and we're always looking for ways to improve how we communicate with the public," said Eli Jacks, chief of public weather at the National Weather Service and manager of this [demonstration project](#). "To ensure we get this right, we encourage our partners in the Weather Enterprise, the public and emergency managers to visit the test website and let us know what they think about this proposed way of communicating winter hazards."

Presently a watch means the potential exists for a particular weather hazard, while an advisory means caution should be taken. Using a snow storm as an example, this demonstration will replace a watch statement

with "The National Weather Service forecasts the Potential for a Significant Winter Storm." Advisories will be replaced with "The National Weather Service Advises Caution for Snow." This message structure can be used for individual hazards or a combination of hazards.

Use of the term "warning" is retained; however, the wording in the warning message more clearly articulates the level of threat. For example, instead of stating, "The National Weather Service has issued a Winter Storm Warning," the test uses the phrase, "The National [Weather Service](#) has issued a Warning for a Dangerous Snow Storm."

"If we can improve our messages, get the public to understand the hazards and most importantly, take action, we need to do so. Depending on feedback from this demonstration, we could replicate how information is disseminated for other weather hazards such as flooding," added Jacks.

The language proposed in this demonstration is just one alternative for simplifying and clarifying winter hazard forecasts. Comments are welcome to either validate this particular alternative, suggest others, or to express a preference for the current Watch, Warning and Advisory System. Comments may be submitted by filling out a [brief survey](#) through March 31, 2013. An analysis of public comments will be made available upon completion of the test before next steps are determined.

This [test](#) is part of [NOAA](#)'s effort to build a [Weather-Ready Nation](#), by ensuring that [National Weather Service](#) forecasts effectively convey threats and elicit public response to maximize safety.

Provided by NOAA Headquarters

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