Cover photo: U.S. Coast Guard photo from the American Red Cross

When You Vacation . . .
Take a Weather Forecaster Along

by
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Think how much better your vacation would be if you could plan your daily activities based on the latest weather forecast available. More important, think how much safer it would be if you had access to weather watches, warnings, and special weather advisories when severe conditions threaten.

AP Laserphoto

National Weather Service warnings can be especially critical to people camping in mountainous areas prone to flash flooding, or to boaters who might be caught on the water when a severe thunderstorm moves across the area.

NOAA Weather Radio, "The Voice of the National Weather Service," is a service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce, and provides continuous broadcasts of the latest weather information directly from local National Weather Service offices. It's a service that virtually allows travelers to take a weather forecaster with them wherever they go, to constantly advise them of weather conditions and to alert them of possible weather hazards on the horizon.

Most NOAA Weather Radio stations operate 24 hours daily, giving information tailored to the needs of people within the receiving area. For example, stations along the sea coasts and Great Lakes provide specialized weather information for boaters, fishermen, and others involved in marine activities, as well as the usual airing of general weather information.

The stations repeat taped weather messages every four to six minutes, revising the information every one to three hours, or more frequently as needed.

During spells of severe weather, National Weather Service personnel can interrupt the routine weather broadcast and substitute special warning messages.

They can also activate specially designed warning receivers.

These warning receivers either sound an alarm indicating that an emergency exists or, when operated in a muted mode, are automatically turned on so the warning message is heard. This can be especially useful to travelers who have not had the opportunity to hear a local forecast.

NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts are made on one of seven high-band FM frequencies from 162.55 megahertz (MHz)--frequencies not found on the average home or automobile radio now in use. However, a number of radio manufacturers offer special weather radios to operate on these frequencies, with or without the emergency warning alarm. These radios are relatively inexpensive, ranging in price from $20 to $50. Also, there are now many radios on the market that offer standard AM/FM frequencies plus the "weather band" as an added feature.

The National Weather Service operates over 370 stations, making up-to-date weather information available to approximately 90 percent of the nation within listening range (approximately a 40-mile radius of the transmitter) of a NOAA Weather Radio broadcast.

Contact your nearest National Weather Service office for more information on NOAA Weather Radio, or write to National Weather Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

NOAA Weather Radio could enhance your vacation and possibly save your life during severe weather. So why don't you take a weather forecaster along when you travel this year?

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Using Weather Information For Emergency Management in a Small Coastal Community

by
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Emergency management coordinators in small coastal communities where hurricanes are an annual threat may wish to consider some new and innovative sources of weather information this year. When a storm is threatening, there can be no substitute for timely, detailed information from the National Weather Service (NWS). Now, some alternatives are available for obtaining this information.

As a hurricane approaches land, weather radars are extremely valuable--not only for tracking the eye of the storm but also for showing the bands of heavy rain and squalls. Direct connection to the NWS radar can be made in an Emergency Operations Center (EOC), but these hook-ups are expensive and require some type of permanent arrangement. An alternative source of weather radar information is now available on many community cable television systems. These systems usually allocate one of the channels to show the display from the NWS radar; often the NOAA weather radio broadcast is placed on the audio portion. Sometimes, the franchisee in a community is willing to install a gratuitous drop in the local EOC for use when a storm emergency exists.

When NWS issues its regular advisories, it is often desirable to have a printed copy of the full text, including the new probability data. Also, the marine advisory--with data on the radius of gale force winds, wave heights, and the forecast storm track--is valuable. However, much of this information is presented in summary form by NOAA Weather Radio. The full text can be obtained only if a teleprinter and appropriate communications circuits are available. The limited seasonal use of such equipment sometimes makes it difficult to justify installation in a small community where financial resources are limited.

Many small municipalities use microcomputers that can be used to access this information during the hurricane season. Since most of these computers are portable, it is easy to move one to the EOC when a hurricane develops.

The private vendors of the weather information obtain the advisories upon release by NWS and have them available for display or print-out for your use. Acquiring information in this way is dependent on having telephone service and power, but these services are usually reliable in the period when a storm is approaching and important evacuation decisions must be made.

In addition to having the current hurricane advisories, data vendors offer a selection of other weather information. This includes hourly weather reports from airport stations giving wind direction, wind speed, rainfall intensities, accumulated rainfall, and other valuable information.

The cost of hurricane advisories and other weather information via computer is usually nominal because hardware is already available for use in most communities. Typically, you can expect to spend about $100 on data for a particular storm unless it stays for an unusual number of days.

For more information about these weather data vendors and services available, ask your local National Weather Service contact for a list of companies.

New computer software programs are available that use the storm coordinates to compute the direction of movement and forward speed of a storm in addition to displaying a map showing its track. Most computer software catalogs list sources of these programs.