



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Weather Service
Weather Forecast Office Burlington, VT
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www.weather.gov/btv

May 27, 2011

TO: Vermont School Superintendents and Principals

SUBJECT: Weather Safety in the Schools and NWS Decision Support Services

NOAA Weather Radio and Weather Safety in the Schools

Several years ago, a National partnership between Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Education and National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) distributed NOAA All Hazards Weather Radios to public and private schools throughout the United States.

This was a great effort and cause, BUT it was a "**National**" effort that unfortunately didn't include local National Weather Service (NWS) offices or Local or State Emergency managers. Therefore, the opportunity for a coordinated educational and weather safety outreach to each school district and school was overlooked.

NOAA Weather Radios are a direct link to NWS offices in obtaining life-saving weather warnings within seconds. Therefore, I strongly encourage schools to find and utilize these radios by placing them in the school administrative offices.

In Vermont, much of our severe weather (damaging thunderstorms, tornadoes or flash floods) typically occurs outside the school calendar, but it still does happen.

In June 2008, a severe thunderstorm moved across Williston Central School at the time of afternoon dismissal. Although there was damage on school property and the adjacent neighborhoods, thankfully there were no injuries. A warning was issued 25 minutes in advance of this storm and broadcast on NOAA Weather Radio.

This past December (2010), a significant wind storm ravaged portions of the northern Champlain Valley and western slopes of the Green Mountains while school was in session. Warnings describing the areal coverage, wind magnitude, impact and timing were issued more than 24 hours in advance and broadcast on NOAA Weather Radio.

Just recently (April and May 2011), thunderstorms and heavy rainfall caused extensive flooding across much of northern Vermont, which closed roads, flooded homes and businesses and forced the cancellation of schools. Again, warnings were broadcast on NOAA Weather Radio.

Therefore, it is essential that school administrators have the ability to access weather warnings in real time, as well as have a weather safety plan to invoke, when the need arises.

In addition to NOAA Weather Radio, the NWS has recently implemented a free service called Interactive NWS, which sends warnings to mobile devices and/or e-mail in seconds.

NWS Decision Support Services

The NWS is the sole producer of official weather advisories, watches and warnings. We provide 24/7/365 forecast and warning operations for Vermont and work closely with Vermont Emergency Management (VEM). All of our forecasts, warnings and other meteorological data are available via our website (www.weather.gov/btv).

In addition to our routine dissemination of weather information on NOAA Weather Radio, the internet and through the media, the NWS is focusing on Decision Support Services. Put simply, we are striving hard to better understand the weather information needs that decision makers, such as yourself, require and use that knowledge to improve our services to meet those needs.

For example, when you are making decisions about school closures due to a winter storm, there are probably a number of weather-related factors that come into play. Whether it is the type of precipitation, the start/end times, or how heavily it will fall and when, we are striving to better understand those factors and improve our communication of that information. We want to help you make better informed decisions.

We also recognize that there may be a variety of weather sources, such as websites or the local media, which you refer to. There is nothing wrong with that, however their forecasts are created using NWS forecasts as a basis before they are tailored to meet the needs of their customers - whether it is the television viewers across all of Vermont or someone on their way to work wondering if they need to bring an umbrella. Thus it is possible that the information you are using to apply to decisions regarding your local school district wasn't really meant for your area.

We welcome all opportunities to assist school administrators in their decision making plans by providing detailed weather information as requested. The NWS Burlington office can be reached 24/7/365 at 1-800-863-4279. In addition, we would like to get your feedback on what critical information we can provide, when and in what format would best serve your needs.

The following links will hopefully provide some background and useful information;

NWS Burlington - <http://www.weather.gov/btv/>

iNWS – Interactive NWS - <http://inws.wrh.noaa.gov/>

Public Alert Radio for Schools - <http://www.weather.gov/nwr/schools/index.html>

NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards - <http://www.weather.gov/nwr/>

Education/Outreach at NWS web site - <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/education.php>

Jet Stream - Online Weather School - <http://www.srh.noaa.gov/srh/jetstream/>

VT Emergency Management Preparedness - http://vem.vermont.gov/community_preparedness

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. Thank you for your time and I'm looking forward to assisting you in the future.

Sincerely,

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