



American Meteorological Society
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Press Release
Devastating Weather of 2011:
The Meteorological Community Responds to Improve Readiness

Last year was among the most damaging and deadly years in United States recorded weather history. The United States experienced more than 1,000 direct weather-related fatalities and more than 8,000 injuries. A record 14 separate disasters with economic losses greater than \$1 billion occurred.

Unfortunately, the public may become complacent about the threat posed by extreme weather as time elapses and the last major weather event fades from memory. Public education about being “weather ready” must, therefore, be a sustained process.

Educating and training citizens to think like risk managers, to connect the dots from approaching threat to present danger, encourages progress in improving survivability in the face of future major, deadly weather events.

At the 2012 American Meteorological Society Washington Forum this week, experts met to share their knowledge in confronting public complacency, improving decision making and employing preparedness and response strategies.

Dr. Louis Uccellini, Director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Centers for Environmental Prediction and an expert on extreme weather in the United States drew attention to the task ahead.

“Our ability to predict extreme weather 5 to 7 days ahead of time is a major advance for the entire weather enterprise. The prediction for the extreme weather events best illustrates the successes we have realized in the ability to forecast severe weather. Yet, over 500 people still lost their lives last year in the tornado events alone. We need to finish the last mile of this challenging journey where better preparedness and life saving results await.”

The National Weather Service, along with other partners in America’s Weather and Climate Enterprise, recognize that preparing the U.S. to be a weather-ready nation requires that experts work together to maximize the benefit in all segments of society. **Chris Strager**, the National Weather Service’s Advisor for Science and Service Integration, pointed out the need for each community to be ready to take on the challenges associated with recovering from a major weather-related disaster.

“Each extreme weather event provides an opportunity for communities to be better prepared when then next one arrives. The speed with which a community gets back on its feet physically, emotionally and economically after feeling the full brunt of nature is directly related to their preparedness. For proper actions to be taken, people need to trust how they get information from the Weather and Climate enterprise.”

The economic impact that these major events have on communities and the nation is staggering. **Steve Root**, President of WeatherBank and the American Weather and Climate Industry Association, said catastrophic losses suffered by businesses in damaged regions adds another layer of strife for impacted communities.

“Every community must get the message quickly in order to take the appropriate action to, not only survive, but be resilient.”

Carl Hedde from Munich Re America pointed out his team gets communities ready by supporting activities to make our infrastructure sounder. From 1980 through 2011, about 65% of insured losses worldwide occurred in natural disasters in North America. In addressing this potential community disruption, his company advocates a forward-thinking, socially aware approach to dealing with disasters before they happen.

Munich Re is a founding partner in the non-profit Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, which, at its test facility in South Carolina, subjects homes to hail, wind, water and other extremes in an attempt to test products and improve building codes nationwide. Carl added:

“More companies should get involved because many positives come from prevention.”

Alessandra Jerolleman, executive director of the Natural Hazard Mitigation Association (NHMA) agreed. The NHMA has been instrumental in setting up weather risk education for homeowners, emergency agencies and state planning organizations. For example, the NHMA is assisting with implementation of strategies ranging from dune building in South Carolina to the Bolivar Blueprint in Texas. Ms. Jerolleman also advanced the concept that entrepreneurship in weather risk mitigation helps achieve results faster. She pointed to the recently held 2nd Annual Water Challenge Project in New Orleans - which provided \$50,000 of initial capital towards innovative solutions to flood management. Recalling other successful projects nationwide, she added:

“Innovation stirs the pot of improvements. In all these cases, we work to get the best, most creative ideas our science can offer in front of as many people as possible to improve the odds of coming out of these natural disasters quickly and strongly. While there has been progress, people remain in harm’s way. The price of failure is simply too high.”

America’s Weather and Climate Enterprise creates products and provides services that enter into every sector of our economy and lifestyle by protecting people, property, and profits.

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