

Meteorological Development Laboratory visits weather forecast offices

Note: This article was originally published in NWS News on Nov. 17, 2011



Since 2003, staff from the [Decision Assistance Branch](#) of the National Weather Service's [Meteorological Development Laboratory](#), or MDL, have visited more than 90 NWS Weather Forecast Offices to provide training, and, at the same time, gather feedback on the decision assistance tools and applications they've developed.

The MDL staff usually devotes an entire day to the weather forecast office visit. They give PowerPoint presentations, which serve as refresher training on MDL applications. Forecasters can learn some of the more obscure features, and discuss operational use, of the tools. They also have a chance to give MDL developers direct feedback on which applications and features are used in the office, which are not, and why. Their suggestions for future development can influence future plans and priorities.

The range of tools covered during the visit includes [Flash Flood Monitoring and Prediction \(FFMP\)](#), the [System for Convection Analysis and Nowcasting \(SCAN\)](#), [SCAN Digital Mesocyclone Detection \(DMD\)](#), the [Four-Dimensional Storm Cell Investigator \(FSI\)](#), [Guardian](#), [SAFESEAS](#), the [System for Nowcasting Of Winter Weather \(SNOW\)](#), and the [Fog Monitor](#).

“I have had a number of occasions where I'd work with a weather forecast office person to spice up Guardian usage,” said MDL’s **Tom Filiaggi**, referring to a customizable system-to-user communication tool within the Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System, or AWIPS. “Once they get a better understanding of what it is designed to do, they like to see it in action, and usually have ideas on how it can benefit their operations. I just help them set it up.”

“The [staff in the] field also likes to hear about what is coming in the future — and they seem to very much appreciate technical discussions,” said Filiaggi. “They like to hear those details from MDL developers, and they like to be heard, as we can take back with us various issues that the field brings up — things we either can implement or keep in our list of considerations for future software, or add to technical requirements lists.”

While MDL’s visits have focused on AWIPS Decision Assistance tools, the office visits recently began to include other MDL projects, such as the [Model Output Statistics \(MOS\)](#) guidance and the [Local Aviation MOS Program \(LAMP\)](#).

“It’s difficult for any one developer to be an expert on all of MDL’s activities,” noted **Mike Churma**, an MDL developer who has often visited weather forecast offices, “but we try to track down the right people to follow up on unanswered questions once we get back to the lab.”

The “Ask MDL” customer service group, reachable by forecasters at nws.askmdl@noaa.gov, has representation in other MDL branches, and can help visitors find the right expert to answer the forecasters’ questions.