

***NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE POLICY DIRECTIVE 10-20  
SEPTEMBER 17, 2003***

***Operations and Services***

***FORENSIC SERVICES***

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**NOTICE:** This publication is available at: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/directives>.

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**OPR:** W/OS5 (J. Lee)

**Certified by:** OS (G. Mandt)

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***SUMMARY OF REVISIONS:*** This directive supersedes NWS Policy Directive 10-20, dated July 2, 2002. Major revisions include, amending Section 4 to state the level of customers who are provided weather documentation and are dissatisfied with that documentation, should not exceed 2 percent. This policy directive was revised by removing the list of directives from Attachment 1, allowing for more timely and efficient responses to future needs for procedural changes in the Forensic Services Program.

1. This policy directive governs National Weather Service (NWS) activities to support weather-related accident investigations and litigation. Weather is a factor in a substantial number of transportation-related accidents. These accidents are routinely investigated by Government agencies having legal responsibility to determine the probable cause and make safety recommendations. The Government may become a defendant in litigation arising from transportation accidents.
2. The objective of NWS Forensic Services is to provide effective and timely weather support to Government agencies and offices involved in accident investigation and litigation, and provide dependable and timely weather documentation services in response to mission information requests.
3. This directive establishes the following authorities and responsibilities:
  - 3.1 NWS Forensic Services will ensure the program is consistent with the NWS mission and with Department of Commerce and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) policy.
  - 3.2 The Office of Climate, Water, and Weather Services (OCWWS) is responsible for the overall management of Forensic Services. This includes:
    - a. Preparing procedural directives consistent with this policy directive.
    - b. Maintaining an awareness of all investigative and legal activity concerning weather-related aviation and marine accidents.

- c. Maintaining an efficient and timely accident notification process within the NWS.
- d. Providing assistance to and participating in weather-related transportation accident investigations conducted by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and other Government accident investigation offices.
- e. Providing assistance and technical advice to Government attorneys in legal cases evolving from weather-related accidents.
- f. Assisting in the preparation of NWS employees required to testify at Public Hearings convened by the NTSB, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), or Coast Guard; and at legal proceedings (e.g., deposition or trial).
- g. Working with the appropriate NOAA offices to ensure the maintenance of a weather records retention system that meets the needs of the accident investigation/legal community.
- h. Responding to legal production, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and mission information requests for weather records requested by Government attorneys and accident investigation offices; and by private attorneys, consultants, and the general public.

3.3 NWS Regional Headquarters will provide the required assistance, cooperation and resources to effectively discharge the accident investigation/litigation support responsibilities as detailed in section 3.2.

4. To measure compliance with this policy directive, customers who are provided weather documentation services and who are determined to be dissatisfied with the services so provided should not exceed 2 percent.

5. This policy directive is supported by the glossary of terms in Attachment 1. Procedural directives will be issued to implement this policy as needed and determined by the Director, Office of Climate, Water, and Weather Services.

Signed by John E. Jones, Jr.      September 3, 2003

John J. Kelly, Jr.  
Assistant Administrator  
for Weather Services

Date

**Attachment 1**

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**NWS Office** - The generic term for any NWS facility providing warning and forecast services and related activities. It includes Weather Forecast Offices (WFO), Weather Service Offices (WSO), the National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP), the Alaska Aviation Weather Unit (AAWU) and the Center Weather Service Units (CWSU). The specific type designation for a facility will be indicated when required.

**General Vicinity** - The area within a 25-nautical-mile radius of a WFO.