

# Proposed Simplified Format for NWS Winter Hazards Messages

## Product Description

### Document (PDD)

#### December 11, 2012

#### Part 1 - Mission Connection

**a. Product Description** - The National Weather Service (NWS) uses the terms Watch, Warning and Advisory (WWA) to express (1) how likely we believe a hazardous weather or flooding event is, (2) how bad we think the associated impacts will be, and (3) our expectation of when hazardous weather or flooding will occur.

Results from surveys, service assessments and meetings with partners indicate that many individuals do not always know what these three key terms mean or how they should respond to protect themselves and/or their property. The public may also be confused about what *specific* hazard products mean, such as Winter Weather Advisory, Winter Storm Watch, and Wind Chill Advisory.

To support NWS' *Weather-Ready Nation* initiative, NWS is requesting feedback on proposed alternative headline language that could be used in place of the current WWA system via a demonstration this winter. The purpose of this demonstration is to explore how we might simplify and clarify our hazard messaging products, using winter weather as an initial example. While the alternative language proposed for this demonstration represents one alternative approach, there may be other options users wish to suggest.

NWS will continue to issue and disseminate all current, official winter weather hazard products throughout the demonstration. Also, all Valid Time Event Code (VTEC) will be disseminated as usual with our official products. The alternative hazard messages are being created for 26 participating Weather Forecast Offices (WFOs) using special software developed for this demonstration only. This is done by "translating" the official WWA message headlines to the proposed alternative language.

The translated hazard messages are being displayed side-by-side with a shortened version of our official hazards on our [demonstration web page](#). This web page also provides access to a map and listing showing the 26 participating WFOs, more detail on the demonstration, and information on how to access alternative messages and provide comments. The proposed alternative products will be available for viewing on this site *only* and will not be available on WFO pages.

**b. Purpose** - NWS winter weather hazard products use the term "Watch" to express "Potential", Advisory to express the need for "Caution" due to an imminent weather threat, and "Warning" to express imminent or ongoing "Danger". There are [14 official winter weather hazards products](#) for expressing expected winter weather hazards in all.

For this demonstration, we are creating alternative hazard headlines using these commonly understood terms to lead our winter hazard messages. First, for “Watch”, we propose leading the message with “The NWS Forecasts the Potential for”. Next, instead of “Advisory”, we propose saying “The NWS Advises Caution for”. Finally, for “Warning”, our alternative headline text will read “The NWS has issued a Warning for a Dangerous...”, where the words following the dots articulate the specific hazard.

c. Audience - The audience includes the public, emergency managers, the media, academia, and other users. Based on the comments received, we will collaborate with our partners and social scientists to determine next steps. If the majority of users prefer the alternative approach, NWS will consider options for expanding this demonstration, and will also work with our partners to determine the best way for their systems to ingest and process information contained in the new message formats.

d. Presentation Format - In many cases, the translations will be simple (for example, a “Winter Storm Watch” will be translated to an alternative message headline as “The NWS is Forecasting the Potential of a Significant Winter Storm”. However, there will be times when more than one hazard is forecasted for the same time period (e.g., snow and wind chill). To meet the need to have our software translate every combination of winter hazards that we could identify from our records, we have developed a [Translation Guide](#) that may be accessed for reference.

e. Feedback Method - The demonstration period will run from December 11, 2012- March 31, 2013. Once users have compared the current and proposed products, they may provide summary comments on the demonstration via the [survey](#) provided on the demonstration web page. Users may also comment on a specific, dated WFO message or ask questions of the team via email at [hazsimp@noaa.gov](mailto:hazsimp@noaa.gov). Users may send emails more than once as they review multiple products during the demonstration.

## **Part II – Technical Description**

### **a. Format and Science:**

The NWS has utilized the WWA system for expressing the expectation of winter weather hazards for decades. The proposed alternative was developed by a team of personnel from NWS National and Regional HQ, NWS Weather Forecast Offices, the NWS Operations Proving Ground, and social scientists within NWS. The approach was also validated by external social scientists currently working on other NWS initiatives.

The proposed alternative was developed using a plain language approach, with the goal of enhancing understanding of our messages. In turn, the goal is to support improved decision making by users of NWS information, including public officials.

## **Proposed Simplified System**

This demonstration will utilize terms and phrases intended to reduce confusion and more clearly explain how the public should respond to expected winter weather hazards. The language in the proposed official headlines will be translated to the proposed alternative headlines as follows:

THE NWS HAS ISSUED A \_\_\_\_\_ WATCH

will be translated to

THE NWS FORECASTS THE POTENTIAL FOR \_\_\_\_\_

with the hazard type, level of certainty and expected impact(s) clearly stated in the rest of the hazards message.

THE NWS HAS ISSUED A (N) \_\_\_\_\_ ADVISORY

will be translated to

THE NWS ADVISES CAUTION FOR \_\_\_\_\_

with the hazard type and expected impact(s) clearly stated in the remainder of the hazards message.

THE NWS HAS ISSUED A \_\_\_\_\_ WARNING

will be translated to

THE NWS HAS ISSUED A WARNING FOR A \_\_\_\_\_

with the hazard type and expected impact(s) clearly stated in the remainder of the hazards message.

We will retain the term “Warning” because of its direct connection to protection of life and property but plan to eliminate the individual hazard products within the Warning category.

c. Additional Information - Please contact:

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