

Skywarn

[Skywarn](#) is the National Weather Service (NWS) program of trained volunteer severe weather spotters. Skywarn volunteers support their local community and government by providing the NWS with timely and accurate severe weather reports. These reports, when integrated with modern NWS technology, are used to inform communities of the proper actions to take as severe weather threatens. Skywarn, formed in the early 1970's, has historically provided critical severe weather information to the NWS in time to get the appropriate warnings issued. Thus the key focus of the Skywarn program is to save lives and property through the use of the observations and reports of trained volunteers. (Gropper, 1993)

Despite the elaborate radar and forecasting equipment at the National Weather Service, they are only able to determine the potential for severe weather. They rely on reports from the public and law enforcement personnel and actual severe weather.

Accurate and reliable information from the general public is difficult to obtain. Severe weather is complicated and confusing. The NWS has found that only regular training of weather spotters improves the quality of information. The National Weather Service (NWS) collaborates with Amateur Radio organizations and others to put together training programs. The NWS brings its weather knowledge, the Amateur Radio Service brings its expertise in emergency communications, and together they work with local government and the Red Cross.

The Amateur Radio's operators participation in the Skywarn program is formally acknowledged and encouraged in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Amateur Radio Relay League (ARRL) and the NWS. This agreement indicates that ARRL will encourage its local volunteer groups operating as the Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES) to provide the NWS with spotters and communicators as requested by the NWS during times of severe weather. (Gropper, 1993)

Many civil disasters are the direct result of severe weather and/or are exacerbated by severe weather. Accordingly, the NWS may utilize the Skywarn Amateur Radio operators not only to obtain and disseminate severe weather observations and warnings, but may also use them to maintain close coordination with the Red Cross and Emergency Managers from local government entities under ARES or Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES)(Gropper, 1993). RACES is organization of volunteer Amateur Radio operators trained in emergency communications and severe weather spotting. Authorized and regulated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), RACES provides essential communications and warning links for state and local governments during emergencies. The importance of this additional role for Skywarn was demonstrated during the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew in August of 1992.

Trained Skywarn observers provide the Weather Service with accurate, and timely reports from radio equipped cars and homes. The NWS is most interested in severe weather reports. Severe weather includes flash flooding, hail, damaging winds, a wall cloud (which is the area of a thunderstorm where a tornado could form) and a tornado funnel. If the NWS confirms severe weather with radar and other available information, it then notifies local authorities who then can activate

Civil Defense sirens. The news media receives notification so they can make reports on local broadcast stations.

Skywarn volunteers donate thousands of hours and the use of their own personal radio equipment and vehicles to give their communities advanced warning of life threatening weather. Since the NWS instituted the Skywarn Program, there has been a significant decrease in the death rate due to tornadoes and other severe weather.

Many VUSIT members are active Northern Indiana Skywarn Members, and we hope this cooperation between VUSIT and Skywarn will continue in the future.

Reference: Gropper, Daniel R. Skywarn Net Control Operations Manual, Washington, DC, 1993

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