

Weather Watch Procedures For Western Shore District-sponsored Events

Introduction

Scouting units execute much of their program in the outdoors and thus are subject to the effects of hazardous weather. One of the most important things we can do to prevent being injured is to be ALERT to the onset of hazardous weather. Most weather-related deaths and injuries happen to people who are unaware and uninformed. Hazardous weather phenomenon can develop quickly and cause death or serious injury to Scouts and Scouters if caught unaware or unprepared (ex. tornado that struck an Iowa Scout camp in 2008). Western Shore District-sponsored camps and encampments shall establish and maintain a means to receive time-critical hazardous weather warnings to maximize safety. A listening watch commensurate with forecast weather conditions shall be maintained by the staff that is adequate to facilitate pre-emptive actions to increase the safety of all participants when a hazardous weather warning (or other warning) affecting the location/event is issued. The use of a SAME-enabled NOAA weather radio, provided by Western Shore District, is the minimum requirement with additional multiple avenues of notification (prior coordination with local authorities, use of computers & mobile devices such as “smart phones” and other warning notification services) the preferred arrangement.

Purpose

This document was prepared to establish policy, responsibilities and procedures for Scouters to increase the margin of safety at Western Shore District events (ex. Camporee, Cub-o-ree, OA Ordeal, Webelos Weekend, etc.) related to hazardous weather. Inclement weather is part of the outdoor experience. Dealing with the challenges that inclement weather presents helps build skills and confidence in the outdoors for youth and adults alike. However, when considering whether to proceed or continue with an outing, the benefits must always outweigh the risks. *The intent of this document is not to create a fair-weather-only outdoor program but address a perceived gap in outdoor event safety.* One does not need to be a weather forecaster to achieve this purpose. The specific operation and set-up of a NWR and other devices are not covered in this document. See the associated owner’s manual for operational details.

Responsibilities and Procedures

BSA 2012 National Camp Standards (applicable to Cub Scout Day Camps) require the completion of Weather Hazards training by all staff members. Although not required, the completion of Weather Hazards training by the event staff of any Western Shore District-sponsored event is highly encouraged. This training will help prepare them for informed decision-making in the event of a hazardous weather situation.

In the days leading up to an outdoor event, the organizer and staff should begin to familiarize themselves with the weather synopsis covering the duration of the event through local news outlets or the Internet. This should include maximum/minimum temperatures, humidity (particularly with high temperatures forecast), precipitation and winds. If severe weather or

widespread storms are forecast prior to the event, consider canceling, curtailing or rescheduling the event. If isolated or scattered storms or unsettled conditions are in the forecast, expect to check on the current and forecast weather conditions often. If fair weather is forecast, the periodicity of checking on conditions can be expected to be reduced. Site conditions (structures, open areas, trees (especially dead trees or limbs), etc.), as they relate to sheltering from the weather, should be understood by the event staff as they are a factor in decision making before and during the event. General (i.e. not overly detailed) pre-planned responses to some of the most likely expected weather hazards that factor in site-specific conditions may be discussed and recorded by the staff to improve response time and thus overall safety in the event of an emergency. Be Prepared!

The district has purchased a rechargeable NWR that can also be operated from an 110V AC outlet. It is programmed to receive SAME notifications for Calvert, Charles & St. Mary's counties. The district health and safety chair maintains custody of the radio between events and is responsible for checking it in and out to the event organizer. The health and safety chair will also provide a packet with the radio that includes this policy document as well as laminated cards (as described in this document) for use by the weather watch. The use of additional resources, such as a mobile computing device, "smart" phone or emergency notification service to provide redundancy, are highly encouraged and should be arranged for by the organizer.

Prior to the event, the organizer and staff should prepare a weather watch duty roster as well as determine how participants and staff will be notified of a situation that requires immediate or imminent response.

Event staff should familiarize themselves with the basic operation of the NWR. The NWR and any additional monitoring devices should be fully charged prior to the event. The NWR and any additional devices should be located at a sheltered, central watch-keeping location (ex. Admin, HQ, Command Post, etc.) during normal awake hours, particularly during poor weather. The NWR must be positioned in a location with adequate reception. *NOTE: Reception can vary from place to place and moving the radio, even a few feet, can change reception.* In addition to any mobile phone or computer, the NWR may also be carried by the watch stander using the belt clip. At night, conditions permitting, consideration may be given to relocating the NWR and other mobile devices to the watch stander's tent. If unsettled conditions are present with severe weather probable, an overnight awake watch rotation must be considered.

Upon arrival at the site or encampment, the event director shall establish a weather watch commensurate with forecast conditions. Depending on the weather forecast, this could be a dedicated or shared task executed by a single staff member or as a rotating assignment. Poor weather may indicate a more dedicated assignment whereas the best weather would allow a staff member to take on other responsibilities during the event. Just as the weather changes, so can the required attention to weather conditions. An example is if a weather system or front is expected to pass through during the event, the watch may need to increase in intensity as it approaches and then decrease after it passes through. Additionally, if weather conditions are good but strange clouds start moving in and the weather begins to look stormy, turn on the NWR or use another resource to get the latest weather forecast.

Table 1 presents guidelines for watch standing and monitoring of conditions. These are merely guidelines and not a substitute for common-sense judgment based on the weather forecast and prevailing weather conditions and staffing.

Weather conditions	Watch type	Forecast update frequency
Severe storms or unsettled conditions	Active	Hourly
Isolated or scattered storms	Semi-active	Every 3-6 hours
Excellent	Semi-passive	Twice daily (AM/PM)

Table 1 – Weather Watch Standing Guidelines

Once the watch has been established, the weather conditions & status card shall be completed by listening to the current weather forecast. The card should be updated as frequently as indicated in Table 1. Current and forecast weather conditions, particularly less than ideal conditions, should be shared with unit leaders upon or shortly after arrival. If preplanned responses have been developed, consider giving an overview of them to unit leaders. A Friday evening Scoutmaster/Senior Patrol Leader meeting would be a good example of when to accomplish this.

Upon receipt of a weather WATCH notification from the NWS by the watch stander, the event director shall be notified within thirty minutes. The nature of the watch should determine whether or not any actions need to be accomplished by the staff or participants and when. A WATCH essentially means there is a “chance” this condition will happen and usually covers a large geographical area for a lengthy period. Nonetheless, the event director must evaluate whether to change the character of the weather watch and thus the frequency at which the current and forecast conditions are monitored.

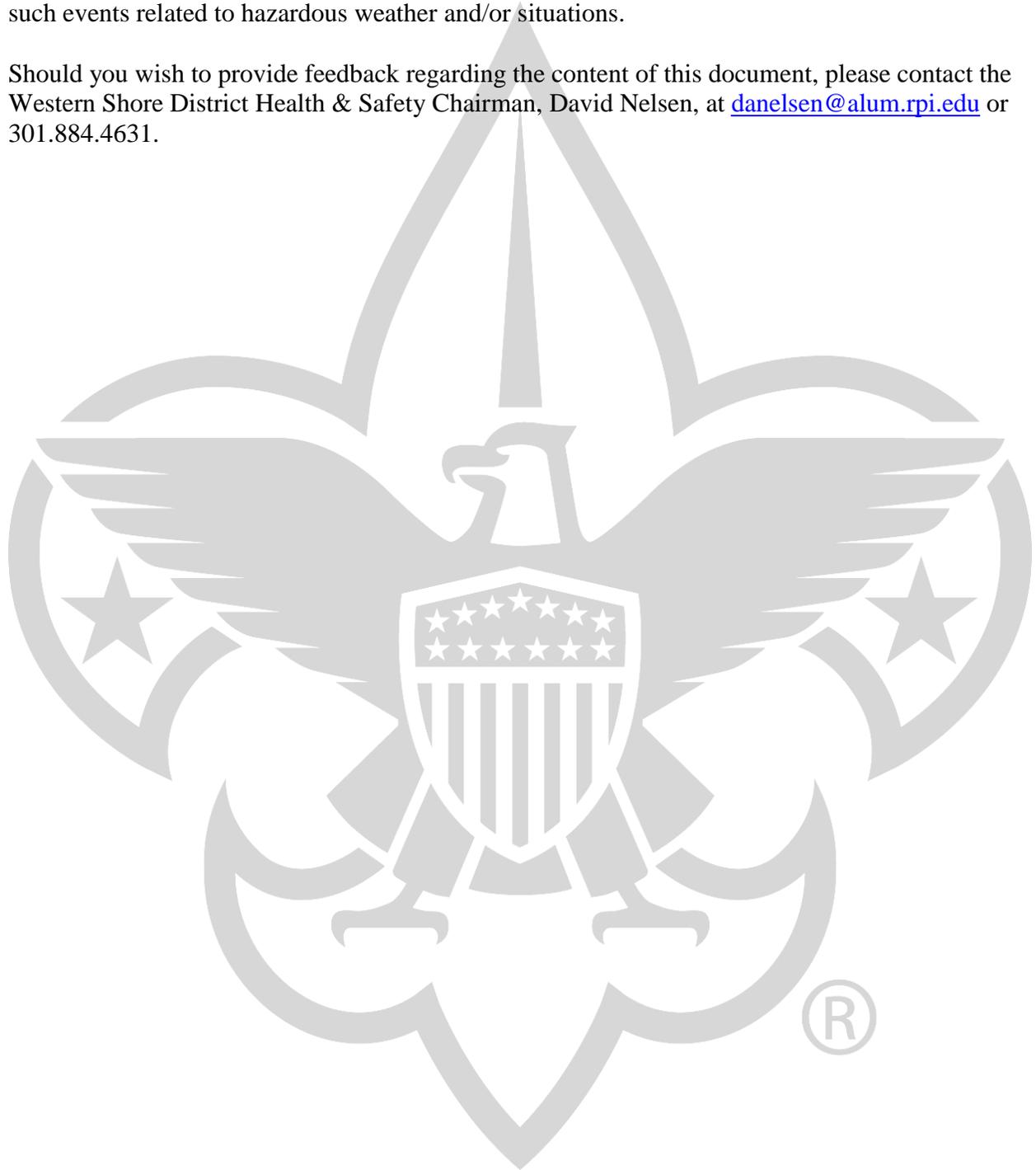
Upon receipt of a weather WARNING notification from the NWS by the watch stander, the event director shall be notified immediately. The event director shall determine himself or in consultation with his staff, what response to direct. Event participants shall be directed to take shelter as may be indicated by actual or developing conditions (in accordance with preplanned responses, if developed) until such time as the weather hazard has abated. When a weather warning has been issued by the NWS, time is of the essence. A WARNING means the said weather is already occurring or is likely to occur and to take proper protective measures. Warnings are usually issued for much smaller geographical areas and usually for shorter more definite periods. Do not delay in notifying event participants to take appropriate action.

In the event of an emergency resulting from a hazardous weather or other event, DO NOT DELAY IN CONTACTING LOCAL EMERGENCY SERVICES IMMEDIATELY FOR ASSISTANCE. Afterwards, contact both the Western Shore District Executive/Director and the Health and Safety Chairman with details regarding the situation, as certain information may need to be reported to BSA.

Summary

The procedures and guidelines herein should be adhered to at all Western Shore District-sponsored camps and encampments and will allow Scouters to increase the margin of safety at such events related to hazardous weather and/or situations.

Should you wish to provide feedback regarding the content of this document, please contact the Western Shore District Health & Safety Chairman, David Nelsen, at danelson@alum.rpi.edu or 301.884.4631.



APPENDIX

1. Emergency Alert System (NWR SAME) event codes (partial list)

Event	Code	Event	Code
Blizzard Warning	BZW	Winter Storm Watch	WSA
Coastal Flood Watch	CFA	Winter Storm Warning	WSW
Coastal Flood Warning	CFS	National Information Center	NIC
Flash Flood Watch	FFA	Child Abduction Emergency	CAE
Flash Flood Warning	FFW	Civil Danger Warning	CDW
High Wind Watch	HWA	Civil Emergency Message	CEM
High Wind Warning	HWW	Earthquake Warning	EQW
Hurricane Watch	HUA	Evacuation Immediate	EVI
Hurricane Warning	HUW	Fire Warning	FRW
Severe Thunderstorm Watch	SVA	HAZMAT Warning	HMW
Severe Thunderstorm Warning	SVR	Law Enforcement Warning	LEW
Severe Weather Statement	SVS	Local Area Emergency	LAE
Special Weather Statement	SPS	911 Telephone Outage	TOE
Tornado Watch	TOA	Nuclear Power Plant Warning	NUW
Tornado Warning	TOR	Radiological Hazard Warning	RHW
Tropical Storm Watch	TSA	Shelter in Place Warning	SPW
Tropical Storm Warning	TRW	Required Monthly Test	RMT
Tsunami Watch	TSA	Required Weekly Test	RWT
Tsunami Warning	TSW		

A complete list is available at http://nws.noaa.gov/os/eas_codes.shtml

2. Local NWR Transmitters

Site	Frequency	NWR “channel”
Baltimore (KEC83)	162.4 MHz	1
Fredericksburg, VA (WZ2527)	162.425 MHz	2
Heathsville, VA (WXM57)	162.4 MHz	1
Manassas, VA (KHB36)	162.55 MHz	7
Salisbury, DE (KEC92)	162.475 MHz	4
Washington, DC (WNG736)	162.45 MHz	3

A complete national list is available at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/indexnw.htm>

3. Local SAME codes

024009	Calvert County
024017	Charles County
024037	St. Mary’s County

A complete national list is available at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/indexnw.htm>

4. Resources

www.myscouting.scouting.org (Weather Hazards training)

www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/ (NWR & SAME info)

<http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/HealthandSafety/Resources.aspx>

Boy Scout Fieldbook, 4th ed., Chapter 6, Managing Risk

Boy Scout Handbook, 12th ed., Chapter 8, Hiking [Stormy Weather section]

Guide to Safe Scouting

Weather merit badge pamphlet

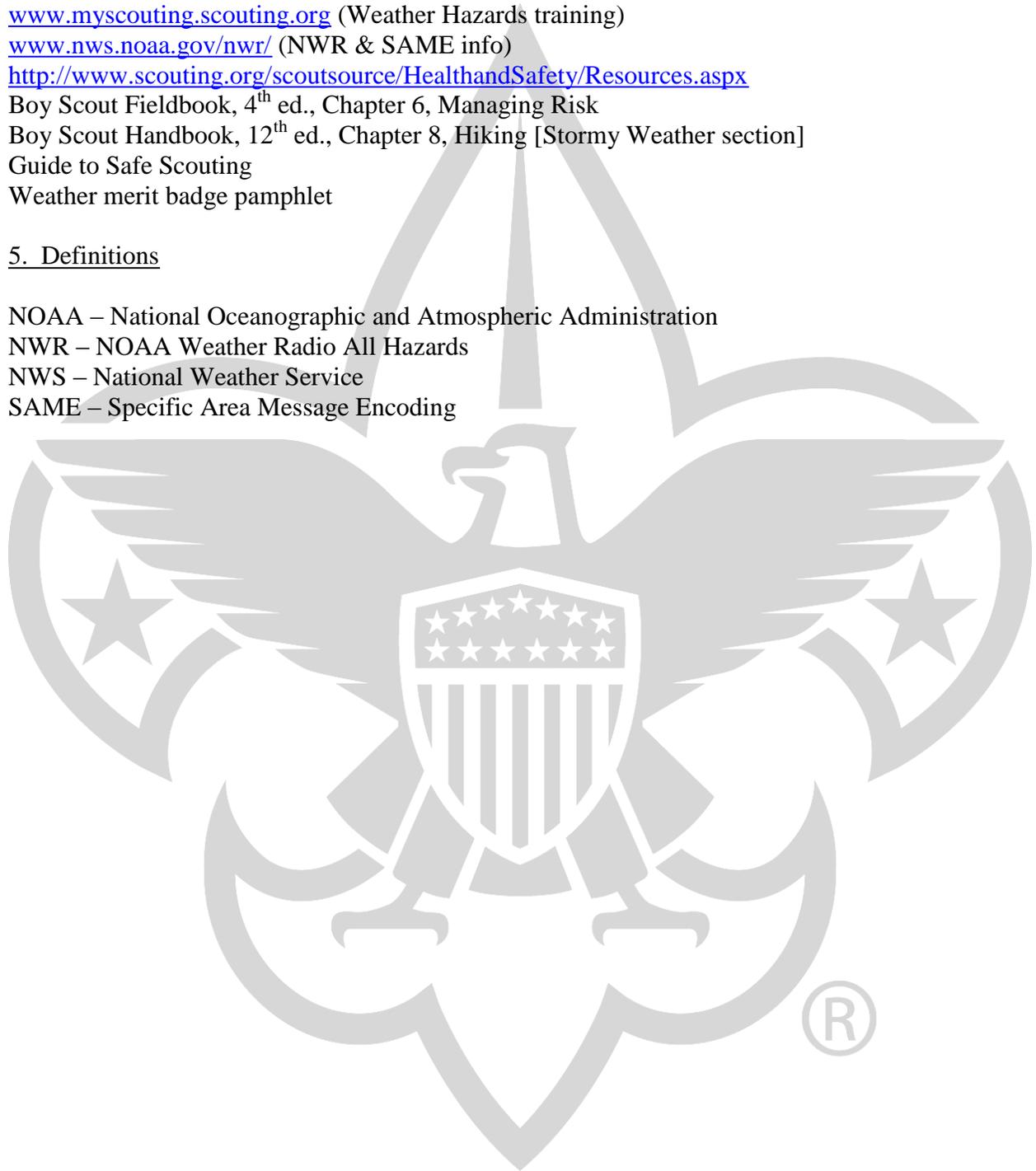
5. Definitions

NOAA – National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration

NWR – NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards

NWS – National Weather Service

SAME – Specific Area Message Encoding



Weather Conditions & Status Card

DATE: _____ SCOUTER ON WEATHER WATCH: _____

STATUS: (ACTIVE / SEMI-ACTIVE / SEMI-PASSIVE)

TIME OF LAST FORECAST UPDATE: _____

TIME FOR NEXT FORECAST UPDATE: _____

LOCAL NWS WATCH / WARNING / ADVISORY IN EFFECT: _____

WATCH / WARNING / ADVISORY SUMMARY: _____

TIME EVENT DIRECTOR NOTIFIED: _____

RESPONSE DIRECTED: _____

CURRENT CONDITIONS

TEMP: _____ WINDS: _____ HUMIDITY: _____

“FEELS LIKE” TEMP (HEAT INDEX OR WIND CHILL VALUE): _____

FORECAST CONDITIONS

FORECAST HIGH TEMP: _____ FORECAST LOW TEMP: _____

FORECAST WINDS: _____

FORECAST PRECIPITATION: _____

GENERAL FORECAST REMARKS: _____
