



National Weather Service SKYWARN Weather Spotters Be a Citizen Scientist



NOAA's National Weather Service (NWS) depends on support from the general public through volunteers. These volunteers, called SKYWARN Spotters, provide vital, real-time observational data.

The effects of severe weather are felt almost every day by tens of thousands of Americans. To obtain critical weather information from a variety of locations, NWS and partner groups set up SKYWARN, a volunteer program with more than 230,000 trained severe weather spotters. These volunteers help keep their local communities safe by sending NWS timely and accurate reports of severe weather.

SKYWARN spotters provide essential information for all types of environmental hazards, however, the main responsibility of a spotter is to report severe local storms. In an average year, the U.S. is affected by 10,000 severe thunderstorms, 5,000 floods and more than 1,000 tornadoes. Where appropriate, spotters also are trained on warning signs for landslides, avalanches, volcanic ashfall, and coastal hazards such as tsunamis, water spouts and rip currents. Since the program started in the 1970s, SKYWARN information, coupled with Doppler radar technology, improved satellite data and other resources, has enabled NWS to issue more timely and accurate warnings for tornadoes, severe thunderstorms and flash floods.

SKYWARN storm spotters form the Nation's first line of defense against severe weather. They are the eyes and ears of the Weather Service. The efforts of these volunteers have given communities the precious gift of time--seconds and minutes that can help save lives.

Who is Eligible?

Anyone with access to a telephone or HAM radio, can join the SKYWARN program. Spotters include police and fire personnel, dispatchers, EMS workers, CERT volunteers, public utility workers and other citizens interested in weather. NWS encourages staff at hospitals, schools, churches, nursing homes and other key locales to become spotters.

How Can I Get Involved?

To get involved, contact the Tom Evans, Warning Coordination Meteorologist (WCM) for the San Francisco and Monterey Bay Areas' National Weather Service office. Tom coordinates training and administers the SKYWARN program.

Spotter training covers:

- Basics of thunderstorm development
- Fundamentals of storm structure
- Identifying potential severe weather features
- Information to report
- How to report information
- Basic severe weather safety
- Information on other environmental hazards in your region

Classes are free and typically 1½ hours. To find out when a SKYWARN class will be conducted in local your area, contact Tom Evans at 520-656-1710 X223.