



Why the Information Technology Officer should be retained at each Weather Forecast Office

The President's budget for the National Weather Service for Fiscal Year 2013 reduces funding for NWS operations by \$39 million, including a \$27 million reduction in the "local forecast and warnings" line item. This reduction includes the elimination of the Information Technology Officer, which is a core position at each of the National Weather Service's 122 Weather Forecast Offices (WFO). The NWS proposes to replace the local ITOs with 24 regional ITOs, who will ostensibly be able to perform the work of 122 employees at centralized locations at a savings of \$9.74 million.

The Information Technology Officer (ITO) is a critical part of the technology and administration of the National Weather Service at the local level and cannot be eliminated:

- ♦ The software that forms the backbone of the WFO's forecast and warnings is known as AWIPs and resides locally on each WFO's servers rather than at a central location. At numerous times, during severe weather outbreaks, the ITO has stepped in to resolve and restore systems to service in a timely manner that has led to lives being saved. According to the NWS's own service assessments covering the historic 2011 tornado event, having an ITO on site during a severe weather outbreak is considered a best practice for Weather Forecast Offices.
 - ♦ The NWS IT architecture has insufficient bandwidth to support remote IT development and maintenance. The download speeds at most WFOs are no faster than they were a decade ago and will not support the remote administration of the diverse systems utilized in a WFO.
 - ♦ A considerable number of software maintenance and repair activities require local access and cannot be performed from a distance. Troubleshooting often requires rebooting machines, observing specific errors, and verifying changes or repairs.
- ♦ The ITOs are responsible for not only maintaining and restoring IT systems, but **one of their prime roles is to adapt AWIPs to local needs and to develop custom software and applications for each WFO's unique mission and needs**, and then training the local forecasters on their use. In fact, nearly all NWS software products were created in the field.

- ◆ In addition, most of the ITOs in a Weather Forecast Office are also meteorologists who help out during severe weather events.

The ITOs in the local forecast offices are designated “emergency/essential” employees. The NWS should eliminate non-essential positions before gutting essential operational positions:

- ◆ The NWS has over 1,000 managers and over 800 contractors – but only 2,200 operational positions in local forecast offices.
 - ◆ As of January 2011, the NWS had 852 contractors at a cost of over \$127 million. As of February 2012, *the NWS did not know how many contractors it has.*
- ◆ There are 141 IT positions at NWS headquarters that will remain untouched.
- ◆ There are four supervisors at each of the 122 local forecast offices who will supervise just 18 employees at most forecast offices. (4.5 employees per supervisor). During the day shift, there are almost as many supervisors on duty as employees supervised. One supervisor, the Electronic Systems Analyst, is responsible for supervising just two employees. *Why not consolidate or eliminate the ESA position instead?*