



The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

June 2006

NWS EMPLOYEES EXPRESS THEIR SUPPORT FOR RETAINING TWO MID-SHIFTS

It is not often that a *Four Winds* gets such an *unsolicited* response as the one concerning the grievance filed over the discontinuation of the midnight shift at the Weather Forecast Office at Missoula, Montana. So we thought it would be good to allow everyone to read what their coworkers have written about management's latest efforts to cut positions in the NWS.

- "Very recently (within the past two months) here at WFO ***, we had a medical emergency on the mid shift. I was the lead, and the journey forecaster became ill. 911 was called, and the forecaster was taken to the hospital and admitted. Just think, or rather not, about what would have happened if only one forecaster was on duty."
- "Thank you for filing the union grievance over the staffing coverage in the Missoula office. This is very important as it involves a number of issues that are central to both why there's a National Weather Service and why there's a NWSEO. You've covered many of these reasons in some detail in your letter to the membership.

I'd like to elaborate more on one of these issues and make some observations. There seems to be an increasing emphasis on "outreach" at the expense of almost everything else, including providing core forecast and warning services and the training to support those services.

As a National Weather Service forecaster for more than 10 years, I've seen and heard many user comments related to policy, service, and product changes. I've seen many user comments on the difficulty of using some parts of the NWS web services and experienced those difficulties myself. In many cases, I've seen the total non-responsiveness of management when those issues are brought to their attention. How often does management ask for input from the field on proposed changes, input from the very people who deal with NWS users on a daily basis, and then totally ignore that input? How many web delivery issues remain unresolved because those parts of the web pages are under centralized and unresponsive "configuration management"?

It seems the persons most in need of participating in more outreach with users are the out-of-touch managers who shun field operations and the critical services provided by those operations. Better yet, if management spent more time in operations providing services to those users, they might be more aware of and more responsive to user needs. They would also better understand any service delivery issues within constraints they've imposed. What is the point of having operations personnel spend even more time meeting with users to better understand user needs if those same operations personnel are kept powerless to resolve critical service issues that users are experiencing?

Even in the absence of budget constraints, I wonder if an average member of Congress would consider it more important to divert resources from core forecasting and warning services and the training and equipment provide those services than to provide office tours or have a forecaster visit a school? Yet, this is precisely the basis for Western Region's support of the "Missoula Plan": diverting resources from service delivery to outreach.

A reasonable amount of targeted outreach activities should be part of any sound overall service strategy. These activities can also be critical in assessing market changes. However, in sacrificing core services and related training, the NWS is charting a course for disaster over the long term, especially in a scientific field where continual training is vital to long-term success."

- "Let me tell you that any office that decides to go to one person midnight shifts is out of their mind. I worked 4 years as a forecaster in a spin-up office, and we were one of the early offices to take over responsibility for forecasts. Believe me, whenever there was severe weather, it was not fun trying to get a set of good TAFs out to the aviation community (during the biggest planning period of the day). On top of the TAFs, we also had to issue the zone forecast and other various products that needed to be issued on the midnight shift. This really concerns me that the leads, the staff that are suppose to be the most experienced in the office, would be removed from the midnight shift and leave it up to the general forecaster to fend for themselves. My question, as a general forecaster, will we get lead forecaster pay for being in charge of the shift? We, the National Weather Service, are sending this agency to the grave."
- "That is an excellent letter with many points very, very well stated! I'm hoping the NWS will become more cautious about such steps that can undermine our workforce resources, our capabilities and eventually degrade our protection of life."
- "Excellent letter and grievance."
- "This is an AWESOME Four Winds!!!!"

- “I’m very interested in how the Missoula thing plays out. I am in support of the union position per your post as you made some very important points that I kind of just plain didn’t think much about. Thanks for being so quick with disseminating the info on the Union Homepage.”
- “I certainly understand NWSEO’s position and would certainly not oppose it. However, for NWSEO actions to impose midnight shifts on employees who otherwise would NOT have to work them may make NWSEO unpopular with certain individuals. Like I say, you are in an ambiguous situation here. I hope it all works out for the best.”
- “Earlier in my career, one of the forecasters around during the time that NWSEO was formed shared some stories about the excesses of management with scheduling before NWSEO was formed. Since scheduling seems to be a significant component of some recent management proposals and since management seems to be willing to use wedge issues such as reduced mids to sell some of their proposals, we may need to remind shift workers just why some of these scheduling issues are so important. Would it be possible to solicit, either from current or retired staff, statements about the type of scheduling issues that existed before NWSEO was formed? These could serve as powerful reminders when considering future scheduling proposals.”
- “I really like what you said in your posting on the NWSEO page as well as in the grievance itself. It is about time someone boiled it down to what the grand scheme of NWS HQ really is - reducing FTEs. Western Region’s claim that freeing up the extra body is “just for more outreach” is such a thinly-veiled cover for what the real reason is - getting rid of forecasters. I’ve heard that same (expletive omitted) from my MIC, about how the grids will facilitate service backup operations, so one office can “shut down and go do outreach.” Yeah, right. He has even gone as far as to say that HPC or some other centralized body should do the grids - then we can spend all our time doing outreach, or on training. I countered with “what is the point of doing outreach if an office isn’t producing any work to do outreach about? Or what is the point in training if we don’t use any of the science in our work?” He couldn’t answer those questions. But I digress. Great job, Dan!”

Frankly, the NWSEO was a little surprised by all of the positive feedback that we have received and to date we have received **no** negative feedback. Thank you to all that have taken the time to write in.