



The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

October 2005

CONGRESS ASKS GAO TO EXPLORE WISDOM BEHIND NEW “CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS”

Congressional leaders concerned about the “nested office concept” and a new “concept of operations” have requested the General Accounting Office to conduct a study of NWS forecasting operations.

On July 22, the Chair and Ranking Member of the Subcommittee Environment, Technology and Standards of the House Science Committee submitted a request to Comptroller General David Walker to conduct a follow-up study on the completion of the National Weather Services restructuring and modernization. This request asked the GAO to evaluate the ability of the NWS to achieve continued improvements in the delivery of services.

In their July 22 request, Chairman Ehlers and Representative Wu also asked the Comptroller General to consider including in its study the issue of any new “concept of operations.” They wrote:

We understand the Administration intends to initiate several demonstration projects to assess the feasibility of implementing a new field office configuration which would alter the distribution of work among the national centers, regional forecast centers and the local forecast offices. Therefore we also request that GAO examine these plans for further restructuring of NWS facilities and its implications for the delivery of local forecasting services, staffing of local forecast offices and the NWS budget.

Ehlers and Wu also requested that the GAO study “plans and policies designed to facilitate the evolutionary development and adoption of new technologies, models and observations systems” as well as “plans, programs and policies designed to facilitate the ongoing training and professional development of NWS employees.”

The GAO has appointed a team of examiners who will soon begin their field investigation, which will likely take a year to complete.

Chairman Ehlers and Representative Wu requested this report following a series of meetings earlier this year between NWSEO representative and Committee staff members, in which NWSEO explained how the “nested office concept” would degrade the quality of forecasts and the availability of staff at WFOs to be available during severe weather events.

The team chartered by NWS Director Johnson to develop a new concept of operations continues to meet every other week. Their recommendations are due to Mr. Johnson by December 16. NWSEO is represented on this team its Vice President, Dan Sobien (WFO Tampa).

NWSEO President Paul Greaves (WFO Albany) has written Director Johnson calling the development of any new concept of operations "premature" until the GAO study has been completed. Greaves has asked Johnson to postpone further meetings of the team until the GAO releases its report.