



The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

September 2006

BREAKING NEWS

National Weather Service Corporate Board Votes to Abandon the CWSUs

On Wednesday, September 27, 2006, the NWS Corporate Board voted to answer the FAA's call for a reduction in costs at Center Weather Service Units by moving this function to WFOs. Eighty-four NWS employees will be displaced as a result. While other options to improve CWSU operations were on the table, the Corporate Board approved this because, among other reasons, it closely follows the NWS' planned "concept of operations" of consolidated services.

The Board decided to relocate the functions of the CWSUs in spite of the NWS' own documents that show that an August 2006 test of running the CWSUs from a WFO failed miserably. According to the just released document, "merging WFO Short Term Desk tasks with CWSU tasks at the WFO inhibits the forecast process and would cause degradation of services when implemented operationally without additional staffing." But the NWS plan would do just that - it will leave nine shifts a week at the WFOs without the additional staffing, putting the flying public at risk. As a result, the forecasters at the affected WFOs will have to pick up the additional workload with the current staffing on at least one shift each day. At some WFOs where air traffic is heavier overnight, such as Memphis, forecasters may be expected to pick up an additional midnight shift.

Under this plan, some offices would take over the responsibility for distant airspace. For example, Albuquerque would now be responsible for issuing forecasts for the airspace over Phoenix as well as El Paso; Jacksonville will be responsible for the forecast from Mobile to Tampa to Orlando to Charleston, South Carolina. It is unknown at this time how discrepancies in the forecasts of common parameters would be resolved. For example, if the WFO at Kansas City, who now has the forecast for St. Louis airspace and the WFO at St. Louis disagree on the timing of a warm front and therefore surface winds, whose opinion would prevail?

In deciding to abandon the vital face-to-face service that has been an integral part of Air Traffic Control for 28 years in favor of providing the service remotely, the NWS has made a giant leap forward in their efforts to consolidate services – the ultimate goal of which is to reduce the number of NWS employees.

NWS management is required to negotiate over the impact and implementation of the relocation of CWSU services with NWSEO before action can be taken. Among the issues which must be addressed in negotiations is what will happen to the CWSU forecasters, as well as accommodations for the WFO forecasters who will have an increased workload. As a result of a recent U.S. Court of Appeals decision, the NWS must negotiate over proposals to increase staffing at the WFOs to accommodate the additional workload unless the NWS demonstrates that such proposals would "significantly hamper" the NWS' operations.