
NWSEO Report On Participation In Operations Committee Meeting Held In Kansas City

Vice President Dan Sobien was invited to a three day meeting of the Operations Committee of the Corporate Board last week in Kansas City, as part of the pre-decisional involvement required by our collective bargaining agreement with the NWS. This committee is tasked with the job of moving the National Weather Service forward in a post - modernization era. The NWS claims that the WFOs and the National Centers will have to change some of their functions to stay relevant in a rapidly changing world. During the meeting, the committee discussed “why” NWS operations should change, “what” should be changed and “how” these changes would be made.

The Operations Committee came up with four broad reasons “why” changes should be made:

- **“We want to re-focus on short term operations”** - This was mainly aimed at the WFOs. It quite simply means that missing an event that is potentially life threatening in the short term, because someone is focusing on extended grids, is unacceptable.
- **“We want to expand environmental services”** – NWS has an opportunity to use the talents of its workforce and new technology to serve the American public in new ways. This will allow the National Weather Service to create new forecasts to save lives, health, and property and to protect our nation’s environment.
- **“Promote Organizational Efficiency and Better Utilization of Expert Staff”** – As you probably guessed, this one reason was offered from management. But the NWSEO is in general agreement that it is in all of our interests to ensure that current and future staff and staffing structure of the National Weather

Service is perceived as efficient by those who design its budgets. This is not necessarily to be interpreted as cutting staff. It is the NWSEO's position that any efficiencies found be used to provide new services for our users.

- **“Accelerate Science and Technology infusion”** - This issue speaks to the need of the National Weather Service to take full advantage of new technology as well as to encourage new operational research and development.

NWSEO Vice President Sobien agreed with the Operations Committee that the NWS must eliminate any missed forecasts of high impact events, expand development of mesoscale modeling and enhance our partnerships with local users of our products. NWSEO also agreed that the NWS should increase environmental forecasts and warnings to serve new users and partner with our parent organization in their development. Finally, NWSEO concurred with the committee that the NWS must fully utilize its infrastructure and scientific expertise to increase local, operational research including research partnerships with outside organizations.

While the NWSEO does not agree with each aspect of the “whys” and “whats” that the committee settled on, it is in general agreement that any thing that we can do to better serve the American public is a good idea. But if that involves changes in how the NWS operates, the NWSEO will work to minimize the impact on our members and even work with the NWS, if they are willing, to make that impact a positive change.

The brainstorming of the “how” to implement changes to the NWS became a bit more contentious. Issues discussed ranged from increasing hazmet training and duties, to a complete restructuring of the NWS with local offices “nested” within regional offices, which would in turn be “nested” within national offices. ***While the NWSEO agrees that there are many things the NWS can do to better serve the American public, we oppose this idea of a “Nested Office Concept”.*** NWSEO believes that the current structure, with viable WFOs and National Centers staffed with experts in their respective areas, is the best way to serve our customers, both local and national customers. ***Any step towards centralization of services is neither in our members' best interest, nor in the interest of the taxpayers that they serve.***

But while NWSEO disagrees on a restructuring of the National Weather Service, there were many exciting ideas that were presented at the meeting. All of

these ideas, including the “Nested Office” concept are just that – ideas and concepts proposed and discussed in order to consider their viability – rather than plans that are being acted on. Nothing that this committee ultimately agreed to last week will make any substantive changes to the way the NWS does business in the immediate future.

Some of the ideas discussed included training every meteorologist in a WFO to become a “TACMET”. These specially trained meteorologists would be dispatched to the scene of both natural and unnatural disasters within their forecast areas to provide local meteorological expertise much like IMETs do at forest fires. Eastern Region wants to experiment with increased gridded services in the 0 through 12 hour period. The NWSEO looks forward to discussing how this will be implemented and its impact on Eastern Region employees. There was the idea of involving RFCs in watershed climatology. Western Region and perhaps others are already experimenting in this area. There are also new and innovative ideas for the observation program.

As opposed to some past discussions where the restructuring and centralization of the National Weather Service forecast structure have been discussed, the NWSEO was fully involved in last week’s meeting. This spirit of openness and teamwork between the NWS and NWSEO is a refreshing change. By allowing the NWSEO to participate and openly debate the merits of changes to operations, the parties have made a giant leap forward in their ability to bring NWS operations to a new level as a team. *The NWSEO in turn commits to openly report to its members what is discussed about their future.*

The NWSEO finds it to be good news that there is no current plan in place to restructure the National Weather Service. As long as we are allowed to continue to participate in these meetings you can be assured we will continue to be your voice and will fight against any centralization of services or anything more than a trivial restructuring of our forecast offices. At the same time it is our intent to work with management to find new and better ways to refine our services. In the long run this will lead to a better work environment for us all.