



*National Weather Service
Employees Organization*

Furloughs and Hiring Freeze to the National Weather Service Threaten Forecast Accuracy

(May 2, 2013) National Weather Service employees say that four furlough days added to the current hiring freeze stretches already short staffed offices to a breaking point, puts the American public at risk, and jeopardizes the agency's mission of saving lives and property. Most of the NWS employees being furloughed are designated "emergency essential," because of their public safety responsibilities and are required to work even during catastrophic conditions. Commerce, air travel, and most daily events hinge on accurate forecasts. The forecasts become life savers in the summer when floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, heat waves, wildfires and thunderstorms are most prevalent.

"Furloughs to the National Weather Service, in conjunction with furloughs to other agencies the nation depends on for emergency services, is like playing 'chicken' with the American public," said NWSEO President Dan Sobien. "One missed event would realistically, cost millions. NOAA is risking everything and has nothing to gain. It's not a sound decision."

The NWS has reduced staffing at forecast offices nationwide due to a hiring slowdown over the past two years. The March 27 NOAA hiring freeze has many currently understaffed forecasting offices feeling the strain even during fair weather days.

Potential impacts of NOAA's decision include:

- Decreased accuracy of aviation, marine, fire weather, and water level forecasts that will cost billions of dollars in flight delays and increased risk of lives and property.
- Reduced efficiency and accuracy for tornado events due to reduced alertness in short staffed offices.
- Staffing shortages at the Hurricane Center will result in increased errors which could be catastrophic. Less NOAA staff will be available to fly into hurricanes.
- Reduced ability to deploy weather support for wildfires and other emergencies.
- A disruption in observations impacting weather model accuracy.
- Outages of critical meteorological, hydrological, satellite, and radar data due to a shortage of employees available to fix system glitches. Help desks and parts warehouses will likely be short-staffed resulting in further delays.

"Staffing at weather forecasting offices is already stretched thin. The very people we count on to be alert for watches and warnings are working overtime and changing from day shift to night shift and back in the same week," said NWSEO President Dan Sobien. "Unfortunately, it will

only take one bad storm to show that NOAA is dangerously cutting corners in the wrong places.”

-NWSEO-

Dan Sobien, President
National Weather Service Employees Organization
Phone: 202-420-1043
president@nwseo.org