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Operations and Services
Dissemination, NWSPD 10-17

NWSChat

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SUMMARY OF REVISIONS: This directive supersedes NWSI 10-1722, *"Instant Messaging (IM) Communications"*, dated November 29, 2017. Many changes were made to reflect the updated NWSChat platform and new Core Partner Policies, along with other editorial fixes. The OPR and Certifying Organization were also updated.

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NWSChat

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1.   Definition

NWSChat is the name for the system providing chat capability to the NWS for the purpose of communicating with partners. NWSChat leverages Slack, a cloud-based Software as a Service (SaaS) and incorporates NWS data feeds that move through NWS cloud systems to Slack. NWSChat can be accessed through Slack on any device, via a web browser or a downloaded Slack application.

2.   Mission Connection

NWSChat is used by NWS operational personnel to deliver Impact-based Decision Support Services (IDSS) and exchange hydrometeorological or other hazards information with "Core Partners" (see definition in NWSI 10-24). This information aids in the efficacy of local, state, regional and national emergency response and recovery efforts, thereby aligning with the agency's mission of protecting life and property.

3.   Concept of Use

Using NWSChat, information is exchanged among NWS personnel and external parties via channels, huddles, direct messages, and other potential communication capabilities provided by the Slack software. NWSChat allows for the creation of channels that are facilitated by local offices and regional/national centers. Each Region, National Center, Weather Forecast Office (WFO), River Forecast Center (RFC), and Center Weather Service Unit (CWSU) will have designated channels as necessary. Users of NWSChat can see and participate in communications with other users in selected channels.

3.1   Hazardous Communication Use

NWSChat may be used to communicate hazardous information (hydrometeorological or other hazards such as tsunami events, toxic airborne or waterborne releases), to provide an understanding of current or future meteorological/hydrological conditions, and to convey NWS expertise to Core Partners in the media, emergency management community, water resources management community, and other government partners, including the aviation, fire weather and marine communities and deployed NWS personnel providing on-site IDSS. Often, this expertise is provided in response to specific queries from Core Partners. These parties may play a pivotal role in communicating the NWS' weather messages to the public, or utilizing the NWS information to take actions which directly aid society's response to significant weather or weather-related events.

NWS personnel may never provide advance notice that an NWS office (field office or national center) intends to issue/extend/cancel a watch/warning/advisory before the product is issued since such knowledge may have commercial value and are considered pre-release of information. Such statements are prohibited, subject to the following exception: NWS personnel may use chat to state that the process for issuing a warning, watch, or advisory product is underway, provided that the product is issued within 5 minutes or less subsequent to the chat conversation. Additionally, NWSChat is not a primary means of dissemination of NWS forecasts and warnings, i.e. Forecast and Watch/Warning information conveyed by NWS through NWSChat will continue to be disseminated through the official channels for NWS products and services.

NWSChat also may be used for Internal Collaboration. All internal collaboration will be done in private NWS-only channels.

3.2   Significant Event Reporting and Sharing

NWSChat can be used as a means for Core Partners to communicate significant event reports to NWS operational personnel who utilize the information to make effective warning and forecast decisions. Chat participants can also use NWSChat as an efficient means of seeking clarifications and enhancements to warning and forecast information from the NWS during a fast-paced significant weather or hydrologic event. Reports should be considered for wider dissemination via official storm reports channels.

4.   Users

All NWSChat users will have individual accounts. All NWS employees may have access to NWSChat if necessary. Non-NWS personnel may be granted access if they qualify as provided in subsections 4.1 - 4.4, below. **Note: Non-NWS personnel must have a need, as determined by NWS, to use NWS Chat.** All users must abide by the Terms of Use.

4.1   Dedicated Chatroom Users

A dedicated accessible channel is available for each NWS operational unit (e.g. Operation Centers, National Centers, Local Offices) on NWSChat if necessary. NWS offices choose their level of participation based on operational requirements and available resources. Each NWS office provides participation privileges to Core Partner (non-NWS) users in their accessible channel(s) who meet the following criteria as defined in NWSI 10-24:

Core Partners are defined as:

"Government and non-government entities which are directly involved in the preparation,

dissemination and discussions involving weather, water, or climate related National Weather Service information, that supports decision making for routine or episodic, high impact events. These entities have a unique need for increased interaction with NWS personnel for provision of IDSS or to facilitate their role in supporting the NWS mission."

Core Partners consist of the following four categories, defined in detail in NWSPD 10-24.

  a. <u>Members of the emergency management (EM) community</u>
  b. <u>Members of the water resources management (WRM) community</u>
  c. <u>Government partners</u>
  d. <u>Members of the Real-time Media.</u>

NWS recognizes that there are a large number of additional individuals who contribute to the overall services provided by NWS or who provide quality services to the public as critical Weather/Water/Climate Enterprise Partners in building a Weather-Ready Nation. However, this "Core Partner" designation is meant to identify those entities that have a unique need for direct access to NWS information and/or that require direct interaction with the NWS because of the level of critical public services they provide or to facilitate their role in supporting the NWS mission.

4.2 **NWSChat Participation Request and Approval**

Core Partner users are granted participation privilege by the field, Regional or National Center, or National Headquarters office with which they are to communicate using NWSChat. Core Partner users may request account access using the NWSChat registration page at: https://partnerservices.nws.noaa.gov/registration/ and accept the Terms of Use (available at the NWSChat website at https://partnerservices.nws.noaa.gov/registration/terms). NWS should provide an initial response to user registrations within 7 days of receipt and a final decision within 30 days if a provisional approval is provided. Note: IDSS may be provided to the requesting entity during the provisional period. If participation is denied, requestors will be sent an email explaining the reason for denial and on how to appeal the decision. NWS Headquarters and the denying office will review appeals and reply with the result of the appeal decision to the requestor within 45 days of the denial.

4.3 **User Training and Terms of Use**

All NWS and Non-NWS NWSChat participants will be required to agree to Terms of Use. Training is also available for all users. All NWSChat users will be required to review and update their personal contact information at least annually. Both the Terms of Use must be agreed to and personal contact information updated annually, otherwise the user account will be disapproved or removed.

4.4 **Password Retention and Reset**

NWSChat user passwords for NWS users are governed by our applicable Information Technology policy. Partner passwords are governed by Slack password policy - https://slack.com/help/categories/360000047906-Your-profile-preferences#manage-your-account.

5. **Field Office Use**

All NWS operational units will participate with NWSChat; however, at no time is NWSChat to interfere with the NWS warning and forecast decision making and dissemination process. An office's level of engagement on NWSChat may vary, pending event and staffing levels, and this level of engagement is at the discretion of the Lead on duty.

5.1   **Equitable Access for External Partners**

If an ad-hoc chat session (i.e., beyond use of the dedicated channel) is set up by a local office, attention should be paid to what individuals are invited to join the chat session, to ensure external partners are treated in an equitable manner. Ad- hoc sessions are not recommended for external partners; Rationale: if members of the media are included in such sessions, all approved dedicated channel users from the media are to be made aware of the chat session by the local office.

6.   NWSChat Content and Etiquette

NWSChat is meant to enhance communications between the NWS and its Core Partners. NWSChat will not replace official NWS products. All exchanges should remain concise, professional, and germane to the given hydrometeorological or hazardous event. References to topics, individuals, offices or groups that are extraneous to a hydrometeorological or other hazardous event discussion should be avoided. Undue personal comments, particularly those regarding other individuals or situations apart from the topic of collaboration, are also to be avoided.

NWSChat will not be used for trivial or social conversations. Use of unauthorized or sharing extraneous content is grounds for removal from NWSChat. All participants should be aware that NWSChat sessions are recorded, archived, are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and may be used at a later time in reviewing particular events or incidents.

6.1   **Copyright**

Any content shared by users (both NWS users and external users) in NWSChat must be owned by the user or they must have documented rights to share the content with NWSChat users. If it is not clear whether the content is able to be shared within NWSChat or further shared, outside the NWSChat system, the content provider/owner should be queried to clarify the sharing policy, or the content should not be shared.

7.   Naming Conventions

Access to the NWSChat system requires a valid account on the server. All users are to have individual accounts. A valid account and name consists of the users' affiliation and full name (e.g., NWS - Des Moines - Joe Smith, EM - Fremont County - Keith Jackson) according to NWSChat naming conventions documentation. Users may adjust their display name while using NWSChat. All activity in NWSChat is associated with an individual account name, but the display name may be used to help identify the user's status at work and help to preserve a level of anonymity in daily conversations. Please see the NWSChat 2.0 Naming Conventions for the most updated, full naming convention details and how to adjust a Display Name.

8.   IT Security

Any NWSChat software installed on an NWS office computer system is bound by all applicable DOC/NOAA/NWS rules and regulations governing appropriate and approved use of federal government IT equipment (see Appendix A). All NWS forecasters and management staff are annually certified in NOAA IT Security and are held accountable for any violations as stated by policy. Partners are governed by their local IT Security policies.

9.   Responsibilities

This Directive establishes the following authorities and responsibilities for NWSChat:

9.1   The Assistant Administrator for Weather Services is responsible for the overall implementation of the NWSChat program.

9.2   NCEP Central Operations (NCO), The Office of Dissemination (DIS), and the Office of Science and Technology Integration/Meteorological Development Laboratory (MDL) are all responsible for Operation and Maintenance of the NWS component of the NWSChat system. The system owner is the NWS Office of the Assistant CIO.

9.3   The Analyze Forecast and Support Office (AFS) is responsible for:
- •   Managing the NWSChat Program
- •   Procedural directives implementing policy and NWSChat Terms of Use.
- •   Policy assistance to regions and field offices.
- •   Training materials

9.4   The NWSChat Program Manager is responsible for the enforcement of policies and program management. Contact information for the NWSChat Program Manager is available on the NWSChat website.

9.5   The National Weather Service Regional Directors and the Director of the National Centers for Environmental Prediction are responsible for:
- •   Supporting the use of NWSChat within their region or Center
- •   Ensuring participating offices within their region or Center are organized and equipped, and personnel are trained to use the NWSChat system.

9.6   Meteorologists-in-Charge (MIC) and Hydrologists-in-Charge (HIC) at field offices or Center Directors and designees may deny or restrict access to external groups by applying policies and NWSChat Terms of Use standards as they deem necessary to preserve the integrity and effectiveness of the local Chat. The MIC, HIC and Directors or designees designate focal point(s) responsible for issuing and maintaining accounts for Non-NWS users who communicate with their respective offices via NWSChat.

9.7   The NWSChat Administration Team, under the direction of the NWSChat Manager, is responsible for maintaining the overarching NWSChat Registration Database and assisting with account management, and user support. The team is composed of individuals from the field, DIS, MDL, and AFS. In addition, local administrators assist directly with users who are registered for their offices.

APPENDIX A

Applicable IT Security Policies

- NIST SP 800-60 Vol.1 Rev 1, 8/2008

- NIST SP 800-60 Vol.2 Rev 1, 8/2008

- NIST SP 800-53 Rev. 5, 12/2020

- NIST SP 800-53A Rev. 5, 12/2020

- NIST SP 800-53B, 12/2020

- NIST SP 800-37 Rev 2, 12/2018

- NIST SP 800-30 Rev 1, 9/2012

- Department of Commerce Enterprise Cybersecurity Policy (ECP), 9/2022

DAO 219-1 (Sections 8.04, 9.03), "The final approval process described in Section 8.01 [9.01] does not apply to National Weather Service employees authorized as part of their routine responsibilities to communicate information about the weather to the public." This is also clarified in the document "Guidance for NOAA Employees Regarding Implementation and Interpretation of DAO 219-1.