PWS Tornado Information Public Consultation

There has been some limited consultation with the public about the inclusion of tornado risk information in weather forecasts. The elderly were perceived to be a group who could be alarmed by the mention of tornadoes in weather forecasters as some are known to be frightened by thunderstorms. The aim was therefore to include a number of older respondents in any public tornado consultation.

Met Office Open Day November 2008

209 members of the public completed the PWS tornado information consultation at a Met Office Open Day in November 2008. 59% were over the age of fifty five and 34% were retired. The consultation was in the form of a presentation. Each participant was asked to watch a television (55% of participants) or listen to a radio (45%) broadcast which included tornado information. Participants were then asked to answer a series of questions.

- When asked to write down three things they remembered from the broadcast, only 50% of these comments made reference to tornadoes.
- When asked if they had noticed the reference to tornadoes 89%, said that they had but only 56% said they had found it alarming.
- 85% of the participants stated they would find tornado information useful and would use it to decide upon the risks to themselves, their family and property and take action accordingly.

A high percentage of participants noted they would like to receive tornado information and that this would not be particularly alarming.

During consultation about warnings at the same event, 91% of participants said they felt tornado information should be included in forecast as a warning rather than just mentioned in a forecast. The very large area of increased risk relative to the small scale of a tornado was not explained or discussed at this brief consultation event.

BBC Weather Centre Weather Panel Consultation

The BBC Weather Centre has a long standing weather diary panel of 20 members whom they regularly consult with. Four members of this panel have been shown the same television broadcast as used at the Met office Open Day. Members were then asked a series of questions.

- When asked what they remembered from the broadcast only one of the members specifically remembered tornadoes and one remembered squally weather being mentioned.
- Three of the members said they had noticed the reference to tornadoes and one did not.
- The three members who noticed the reference to tornadoes were not alarmed however the one that didn’t was.
- All members said this information would be useful and they would use it to prepare and take sensible precautions.

Tornado Information in Actual Forecasts

During the weekend of the 8 November 2008 the duty Chief forecaster at the Met Office assessed the risk of tornadoes and used existing procedures to include the risk of tornadoes in forecast guidance given to the BBC and other broadcasters. Several broadcasters including the BBC passed on tornado risk information to the
public during this weekend. There was a confirmed report of Tornadoes in Waterford, Ireland, and an unconfirmed report of damage caused by a tornado in Lincolnshire.

The BBC and the Met Office have not received any feedback on these broadcasts from the public, suggesting that no significant alarm was caused by mentioning tornadoes in these broadcasts.

**Conclusion**

From the limited consultation carried out it can be concluded that the public think that having tornado information is useful and that there is no evidence that they are overly alarmed by this. The feedback about having specific tornado warnings has not been taken into account because of the lack of explanation about the uncertainty of tornadoes during the consultation.

As confirmed by the recent inclusion of tornado information in live forecasts and broadcasts as long as the information is given in a measured and responsible way the public are accepting of it.

Before tornado information becomes more freely available some low level education for the public should be considered.