



# The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

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## Budget Cuts to National Weather Service Revealed

(April 5, 2012) The NOAA budget request “blue book” summarizes the President's proposed budget for the 2012 and identifies several cuts to the National Weather Service.

Another technical document, the official “budget justification” is submitted to the appropriations committees. The section on the NWS is 109 pages long. NWSEO General Counsel, Richard Hirn has done a careful analysis of this information and has learned about numerous additional cuts and terminations. The Administration's own document concedes that these reductions will result in less accurate and timely warnings of tornados, floods, severe thunderstorms, hurricanes and tsunamis. You can access this document at:

[http://www.osec.doc.gov/bmi/budget/13CJ/NOAA\\_FY\\_2013\\_PB.pdf](http://www.osec.doc.gov/bmi/budget/13CJ/NOAA_FY_2013_PB.pdf)

Below is a summary of cuts from that document including quotes directly from the source:

**Elimination of the Information Technology Officers** at each of the 122 forecast offices for a savings of \$9.7 million.

**Air Quality Forecasting:** The President proposes to terminate the National Air Quality Forecasts of ozone and particulate matter for a savings of \$3.1 million. According to the President’s budget justification, these forecasts are “used by EPA for health-based air quality index summaries and by state and local agencies who issue Air Quality Index (e.g. Code Orange) forecasts.” This reduction will also “discontinue support for continued research and development of air quality models and chemical data assimilation including those efforts focused on aerosol, dust and particulate matter prediction.”

**Wind Profiler Network:** Elimination of the 32 vertical looking radars that track upper air wind profiles that detect potential development of severe weather in the continental U.S. for a savings of \$2.4 million in operational and \$1.7 million in procurement costs. According to the agency’s own budget justification, “the wind profilers also provide information that leads to improved forecasts of other types of severe weather, such as tornados and winter storms, and provides useful information for issuing aviation advisories and wildfire protections.” Data from the wind profilers “has improved probability of detection, decreased false alarm rate, and improved time for tornado warnings, severe thunderstorms, flash floods and winter storms.” Thirty of the 32 wind profilers that will be shut down “are located in the central U.S. along Tornado Alley.”

**Coastal Weather Data Buoys:** Reduction of \$2 million in funding for buoy sustainment. According to President's budget justification, "reduced funding will delay routine operations and maintenance and failure response, and slow design and procurement of environmentally safe moorings." As a result, there will be only 73% data availability and ultimately a 10% reduction in the number of marine observations that would have been obtained without the cuts.

**Tsunami Warning Program:** The President proposes to terminate grant funding for education and awareness programs and to reduce funding for maintenance of the DART buoy network, for a savings of \$4.6 million. According to the President's own budget justification, the reduction in funding for maintenance of the buoys "is expected to lower network data availability from 80% to 72% . . . [W]ithout this data, [tsunami] warnings may extend to a larger area than necessary for a longer time." As a result of the reduction in education and awareness funding, "the cumulative number of communities that NOAA designates as adequately prepared for a tsunami" will be reduced from 140 to 115.

**National Mesonet Network:** A network of automated weather observation stations that are spaced closer together and report more frequently than the NWS's synoptic scale observing network ("ASOS"). Elimination of funding for this observation network will save \$11 million.

**Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service:** Reduction in funding of \$2 million or 24% of overall total for program that provides forecasts of river levels and river flow volumes from an hour to a season, including river forecast information such as: how high the river will rise, when the river will reach its peak, where property will be flooded, how long flooding will continue and how long a drought will last. AHPS also provides better information to water managers and city officials, helping them make decisions about water allocation and economics such as: when and where to evacuate people, how to use reservoir storage capacity and release to reduce flood impacts on people and businesses, and when to reinforce levees and at what level, to help reduce damage to areas nearby.

**Weather Forecast Office Maintenance:** Reduction of \$ .8 million in funding. According to the President's budget justification, "as WFOs continue to age, the facilities require continued maintenance" but as a result of this reduction, the NWS "will reduce its efforts to address backlogged repairs."

**Hurricane Forecast Improvement Project:** \$ .4 million in reduction in efforts to improve hurricane track and intensity forecast error. According to the President's own budget justification, the hurricane track and intensity error rates are anticipated to be greater than if the program remained at currently funded levels.

#### **Hurricane Forecast Improvement Project- Research and Development**

**Supercomputer:** \$2 million or 50% reduction in funding for computer resources will reduce capacity that is being used to support hurricane track and intensity forecast improvements.

**Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System Tech Infusion:** According to the President's budget justification, this \$3.5 million in reduction in funding for forecasting

software systems “will slow implementation of new tools and capabilities aimed at improving decision support services including improved data delivery. . .” The anticipated annual number of “new capabilities and products to sustain operations and effectively access and process data, resulting in better forecasts and warnings” will be cut in half from 50-60 to 20-30.

NWSEO continues its work to keep the NWS fully funded for Fiscal Year 2013 and in the future during these tight budget years. The union is using all of its resources to win this budget battle. We appreciate your support and membership and we encourage you to recruit new members to help us with this cause. Membership is the strength of NWSEO.

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