



EISWG Review and Recommendations  
to NOAA of “Report to Congress –  
Tornado Warning Improvement and  
Extension Program Plan”

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Presented by  
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# Background

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- In response to the requirements of Title I, Section 103 of the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2017 (P.L. 115-25, signed 18 April 2017), as amended (P.L. 115-423, 7 January 2019) (hereafter, the Weather Act), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has prepared and submitted a “Report to Congress – Tornado Warning Improvement and Extension Program Plan” (hereafter, the Report). See Attachment 1. In accordance with Title IV, Section 401(c) of the Weather Act, the Environmental Information Services Working Group (EISWG), a working group of the NOAA Science Advisory Board (SAB), has reviewed the Report and prepared the following comments and recommendations.

The review findings and recommendation were presented and approved by the full EISWG for forwarding to the SAB at the June 2019 EISWG meeting.

# The Review Task Team

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# General Findings

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- The Report is comprehensive and responsive to the requirements of the Weather Act.
- The Report provides a good assessment of the technological and social/behavioral challenges that are essential to address in parallel to increase both the skill of NOAA's monitoring and forecasting, and the effectiveness of its warnings of tornadoes (and other destructive phenomena, such as microbursts, associated with severe thunderstorms).
- The Report describes the several efforts that NOAA has either underway or planned to address technological and social challenges.
- The EISWG was pleased to see the many mentions of working in partnership with the entire Weather Enterprise to achieve jointly the shared goals of saving lives, protecting property, and reducing the economic impact from tornadoes.

# Recommendations Related to technological objectives

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**With respect to technological objectives**, the EISWG notes that some of the challenges could be accomplished with currently deployed technologies through software or hardware upgrades, or the deployment of readily adaptable commercial-off-the-shelf technologies. In particular, NOAA should recognize the following:

While convection-allowing models have made great progress, they still do not capture every important mesoscale feature. Timing and position of thunderstorms can be off in time by an hour or two and in space by a county or more. Model forecasts seem less accurate when storms are already present when the model is initialized.

- **Recommendation 1:** In its development of Warn on Forecast (WOF) procedures, NOAA should include pattern recognition and artificial intelligence algorithms that take into account and adapt for the various known shortcomings in explicit computer model forecasts.

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The greatest successes with tornado warnings come in supercell situations; skillful warnings for non-supercell tornadoes remain a serious challenge.

- **Recommendation 2:** NOAA should focus more strongly on reducing the false alarm rate (FAR) and other metrics of skill in current generation tornado warnings. Polygon-based warnings challenge the way FAR is determined and so demand new methods to quantify true positive, false positive, true negative, and false negative for precision, recall, and accuracy. As warning polygons are now updated as severe storms evolve, FAR measures will need to be assessed over space and time. The ways these metrics are computed should be transparent. National metrics are nearly meaningless by themselves; NOAA should compute and release metrics by Forecast Office. Importantly, while the focus should be on reducing the FAR, such reductions cannot come at the expense of affecting negatively other tornado warning-based metrics, such as the probability of detection (POD). In other words, reducing the FAR while decreasing the POD would not be a positive outcome. These are related metrics, both very important and clearly improving the quality of tornado warnings will require a balance between these two important metrics to provide people with more accurate warnings to support decision making.

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- **Recommendation 3:** As a means for obtaining greater low-level radar coverage of non-supercell tornadic circulations and so significantly aiding in the warning of tornadoes, NOAA should consider:
    - a) reducing the lowest allowable elevation angle on *all* NEXRAD/WSR-88D radars to the minimum possible value, consistent with ground clutter and local environmental considerations, and
    - b) adding one or two tower sections to selected existing NEXRAD to reduce ground clutter, increase the radar horizon, and allow better overall coverage..
  - **Recommendation 4:** To aid in the warning of short-lived tornadoes, NOAA should build on the experiences in south-central Oklahoma and across the multi-county Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area and include networked X- or C-band as gap-filling radars to obtain greater low-level coverage of non-supercell circulations and strong winds.
  - **Recommendation 5:** The NEXRAD processing software used to detect mesocyclone and tornado vortex signatures should be modernized/upgraded to reflect the best science now available. An example is provided by the Mesocyclone Detection Algorithm (MDA), which currently uses only a portion of the available shear information. A modernization of this key algorithm might allow circulations of (weak) intensity levels 1 and 2 to be detected sooner and utilized with some confidence. This could make possible earlier (by several minutes, or equivalently two or three volume scans) detection of the earliest stages of formation of long-lived tornadoes, and allow tracking of at least a portion of the life cycle of short-lived tornadoes.

# Recommendations Related to Sociological Objectives

**With respect to the sociological objectives,** NOAA should recognize that the protection of life and property from the impact of tornadoes is not only a meteorological challenge, but also a sociological one. For example, to justify the costs and effort involved in developing and deploying WOF systems that may provide people advance skillful warnings of an hour or more, NOAA needs to understand better if people will take appropriate actions upon receipt of such lengthy advance warnings.

- **Recommendation 6:** Given the limited number of federal social science positions within the agency, NOAA should utilize its set of joint and cooperative institutes to access social science expertise in the national university community.
- **Recommendation 6:** NOAA should have social science programs charged with investigating questions such as the following: Will people take action more than a few minutes in advance, even if given warnings an hour in advance? Where is the balance between lead time and good decision making? If actions are taken based upon lead times an hour or longer than at present, will this include fleeing and, if so, will road infrastructure and traffic management suffice? Will the public take action based upon probabilistic tornado warnings? How should the public best receive such warnings? Will the public be responsive to repeatedly updated warnings (Report, p. 7 suggests that they could be updated every 2 minutes), or confused by such frequent updates, waiting until the last minute?
- **Recommendation 7:** To reduce impacts in terms of minimizing property losses (as well as improve life safety measures), it will be necessary to implement stronger building codes. NOAA should develop and implement - in partnership with NIST, universities such as Texas Tech, and entities such as the Institute for Business and Home Safety - a weather-ready home certification program as an extension of its StormReady community and Weather-Ready Nation program,. This could encourage in-home shelters, hurricane clips to hold on roofs, etc.



# Conclusion

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**In closing**, the EISWG notes the resources portion of the plan seems generic. This leads to questions such as, “Has a detailed action plan been produced?” “If so, what are the detailed timelines?” “Has a detailed cost/benefit analysis been performed?” Such information is needed by the EISWG to know if NOAA is tracking favorably against the intended deliverables when reviewing subsequent reports.

# NOAA's Clearance Process



Write and edit report drafts

Drafts submitted to LO FCAs for review

Submit to CCU to initiate clearance



NOAA HQ Approvals (Jacobs, Gallaudet, CFO, Policy, etc.)



LO Approvals (AAs, DAAs, CFO, Policy, Budget, etc.)



On to the next report...

Or repeat, if annual report...

# Questions?

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