WINTER WEATHER FORECASTING (Winter 2012-13)

RUN TIME: 3 MINUTES, 31 SECONDS

Jeff Johnson, Warning Coordination Meteorologist
National Weather Service – Des Moines Forecast Office

JEFF: Well, welcome to the National Weather Service. We'll give you a tour of our office and a little bit about what we do here. So, come on in.

Over here we have one of our data acquisition personnel – Kevin Skow – also a meteorologist. And, he's working the Data Tech position. What does that mean? Well, they're in charge of quality control of all the observations coming in, hydrology…

[*hy•drol o•gy: the scientific study of the waters of the earth*]

…monitoring weather radio, making sure the programming's correct, public service, issuing river products and summary-type products.

[*A "product" includes the watches, warnings and advisories issued by the National Weather Service.*]

So, in a winter weather storm – winter weather situation – this would be a pretty important position because we're going to monitor the messaging going out on weather radio, and we're going to monitor the quality of the data getting into our forecasts – particularly surface data, and other data. And also, when we get storm reports, they would go out – this is one of the places they would go out – but we'd send those out for the media to use and for the customer to see. Like, how much snow we're getting in Des Moines and whatnot and so forth.

[*Short Term Forecast*]

So, over here we have Mindy Beerends, she's one of our forecasters, and– wave, Mindy.

[*Mindy waves.*]

Mindy and the short term desk is focused on the first 24 hours, in essence, of the forecast and so she's working on, in this case, this afternoon and tonight's public forecast. And she's looking at all the data and coming up with what she wants to do and if there were a headline needed, such as a winter storm warning or blizzard warning, Mindy would be the one to issue that today.

[*Long Term Forecast*]

Over here, we have Mr. Small and he's our senior forecaster, also our long-term forecaster today and his job is – unlike Mindy who's doing up to 24 hours – Brad gets the entire forecast, public-wise, from 24 hours out to 168 hours – or for the next seven days. So he has a much longer time period to deal with but he's a little bit removed from the current weather.

[*A winter storm watch means conditions are favorable for the development of a winter storm. Typically, a winter storm watch is issued 24-36 hours in advance of the storm, and sometimes up to 48 hours prior. If a watch is issued, the National Weather Service estimates there is a 50 percent chance the event will occur.]*

With the extended or the long-term, does a bigger – he has a larger span to do, but, you know, we have more time to adjust as we get closer. As far as winter weather would go – and this desk – this is where you would see a lot of your winter storm warnings issued. Because our goal is to get those out with up to 20 hours lead time, from the time we issue the warning until the time the event reaches warning criteria.

[*If a winter storm is issued, the National Weather Service estimates there is an 80 percent chance the storm will occur.]*

So the warning decision, quite often in winter weather, is done on this desk. Also, certainly the watches which go out to 36 hours, and in some cases even longer, would come out from the, uh, public – or, pardon me – the long-term forecast public desk.

[*Thanks to the Des Moines NWS staff…Melinda Beerends, Brenda Brock, Rod Donovan, Jeff Johnson, Kevin Skow, Brad Small, Jeff Zogg*]