



PACIFIC REGION TECHNICAL NOTES

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MEDIA WORKSHOPS

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INTRODUCTION

A frequent complaint among meteorologists is that broadcasters-newspaper editors, and other members of the media reword the forecasts. Sometimes this rewording changes the meaning of the forecasts. Since the media likely will not stop this practice in future, it is important that the weather service educate the media in weather matter. The Pacific Weather Centre (PWC) staged two media workshops in 1985 - one in Vancouver and one in Kelowna with this purpose in mind. The emphasis at both workshops was to discuss the media role in disseminating the weather and to explain forecast terminology and format, so that the media might interpret and make correct changes to forecast wording.

There can be little doubt that the media plays a significant role in disseminating weather information to the public. A recent newspaper survey in the Vancouver found that 95% of the respondents received forecasts at least once a day from radio, television and the newspapers. Because the media plays such a crucial role in communicating weather information, it is essential that the weather service maintain good public relations with this group.

The objectives served by this first set of media workshops included the following:

- 1) Improve public relations with the media.
- 2) Emphasize the media's role and responsibility in accurately disseminating weather information.
- 3) Introduce the media to weather services and to the variety of users served.
- 4) Introduce the media to weather forecasting and to its problems and limitations.
- 5) Familiarize the media with our forecast guidelines, formats, and forecast terminology.

The Workshops

The Vancouver Workshop was held in March 1985 while the Kelowna Workshop took place in June 1985. Although both sessions carried the same themes and objectives, some of the topics covered at each did differ because of local needs and wishes. Both sessions were intended to be introductory in nature and were scheduled to last most of the day - a length that proved quite satisfactory. The number of topics covered was kept to a minimum with the emphasis given to thoroughness. The topic's common to this introductory set of workshops included the following:

1. Weather Service
 - . Overview of AES/Weather Services
 - . Introduction to weather reporting and dissemination.
2. The Media
 - . Their role and responsibility.
 - . Introduction to the variety of users of weather information and their sensitivity to weather.
3. The Forecasting Process
 - . Processes involved in producing the forecasts/Weather information used, including observations, satellites, radar, automated ship aerological program (ASAP), numerical models.
 - . Factors that can lead to inaccurate forecasts/problems of time constraints, reduction in night time data, deficient and insufficient data over oceans, equipment and communications malfunctions, misleading numerical guidance, variable weather due to terrain, problems in interpreting cloud and other weather signatures, forecast format and terminology.
 - . Brief "weather lesson" on the upslope effect (to explain influence of varying terrain).
 - . Extrapolated to cover convergence over a low and lifting over a frontal surface.
4. The Forecasts
 - . Public forecasts issued/weather warning criteria.
 - . Guidelines for using the forecasts.
 - . Forecast terminology and our interpretations.
5. Tour
 - . Forecast (and weather) office tour. (For "travelling" workshop, tour of Pacific Weather Centre given by Slide presentation).

Numerous visual aids were used throughout the presentations. Handout packages also were given to each participant, with each package including highlights of the talks and other information on AES. Since many of the media are professionally trained in the areas of print and visual presentation, these aids have to be of high quality and "clean" of spelling and grammatical errors.

While it was intended that these workshops should be informal, it was not known how much informality would be optimum. The second workshop at Kelowna was more informal than the first and was rated by its organizers as even more successful. The Kelowna workshop allowed audience questions to be interspersed with the presentations, while the Vancouver session allowed interaction towards the latter part of the main presentations. Audience participation at the Vancouver workshop was initially subdued, but increased by mid-point. The Kelowna session got off to a robust start and maintained its momentum, even after proceedings officially had ended. The more frequent interchange at the Kelowna workshop likely resulted for a couple of reasons: the greater informality and the fact that relationships between AES and the media tend to be closer in smaller communities. Although a very informal workshop is more difficult to regulate, the benefits are many when the audience consists of the media.

Conclusions

The success of the first two media workshops suggests that future sessions are in order. These two workshops seemed to achieve their objectives. The public relations served were significant and the participants admitted to gaining information that would prove useful to their work. Hopefully, the participants also gained an appreciation of their important role in disseminating accurate weather information to users that often are quite sensitive to the forecast content.

The experiences gained from these two sessions lead to the following suggestions for active media workshops:

- 1) The workshops should travel to the media at sites throughout the region, and should include some tailoring for local interests.
- 2) An informal style workshop works best, with questions interspersed with the presentations.
- 3) Numerous visual aids (overheads, slides) are recommended. (Many members of the media are quite familiar with quick visual presentation.
- 4) Speakers need to be knowledgeable and have other reference personnel at hand, since the questions asked by the media can cover any variety of topics (particularly those having greatest sensitivity or sensationalism).

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