

# Service Description Document

## Instant Messaging for NWS and Partners: NWSChat

### Part I - Mission Connection

#### a. Service Description

Instant Messaging (IM) is a real-time, Internet-based method of electronic communication between two or more parties. IM may also be referred to as “chat.” Utilizing a software application known as a “chat client,” multiple users can compose and send messages to each other in forums known as “chat rooms.” In addition to manually composed messages, chat sessions may contain various automated software-generated messages that convey information about disseminated National Weather Service (NWS) products.

NWSChat is the name for the system providing IM capability to the NWS. NWSChat consists of hardware and software maintained by NWS and client software that can be accessed via a web browser or downloaded on the user’s computer.

NWSChat is utilized by NWS operational personnel to share critical warning decision expertise and other types of significant weather information essential to the NWS’ mission of saving lives and property. This information is exchanged in real-time with the media and emergency response community, who in turn play a key role in communicating the NWS’ hazardous weather messages to the public. IM also provides media and emergency response partners with the ability to communicate significant event reports *back* to NWS operational personnel, who in turn utilize the information to make effective warning decisions. NWS partners can also use IM as an efficient means of seeking clarifications and enhancements to the communication stream originating from the NWS during a fast-paced significant weather or hydrologic event. Feedback processes such as these are crucial to maintain and improve our agency’s warning performance.

b. Product Type – Web and Client based communications service.

#### c. Purpose

NWSChat provides NWS operational personnel with a quick, efficient means of exchanging hydrometeorological information with media partners, emergency management officials, and other members of the hazard response community. NWSChat fosters an effective two-way flow of time-sensitive information between the NWS and its partners during periods of hazardous weather, as well as during other significant natural and human-induced events.

#### d. Audience

The target audience for this experimental service includes other government entities, electronic media partners, emergency managers and other members of the hazards response community, and Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES)/Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES) Skywarn Net Ham Operators. These constituents play a critical role in helping the NWS achieve its mission of protecting life and property.

**e. Presentation Format**

Information exchanged between NWS forecasters and partners is displayed as text via an IM client.

**f. Feedback Method**

User feedback is extremely important in our effort to improve the quality and usefulness of products and services. Comments on NWSChat may be sent to: [mwschatmanager@noaa.gov](mailto:mwschatmanager@noaa.gov)

**Part II – Technical Description**

**a. Format and Science Basis**

IM is a synchronous real-time method of communication. Multiple users can send messages to each other via a server in what is called a "chat room". The messages are composed and sent via software called a chat client. This client also displays the responses from the other users in the chat group. Because of its real-time nature, this form of communication lends itself well to the sharing of significant weather reports and information on both natural and man-made disasters between the NWS and members of the hazards community. Such communication between the groups will facilitate enhanced documentation of hazardous weather events, in turn directly improving the NWS' tornado, severe thunderstorm, flash flood and winter storm performance (GPRA) goals. Beyond instant communications, the chat room medium provides the capability of archiving all transcript logs, thus helping to improve the quality of data input into Storm Data.

**b. Availability**

The NWSChat system is available at: <http://nwschat.weather.gov>

The site includes documentation, training materials, and account request capability. In order to use NWSChat, client software must be installed on the user's computer. The NWSChat site includes links and information related to installing client software.

NWSChat is available to any NWS Office and Center, and to qualified partners.

Each NWS participating office or center may invite qualified partners to participate. Additionally, potential partners may request an account from the [nwschat.weather.gov](http://nwschat.weather.gov) website. Non-NWS participants must meet one of the following criteria:

- a. Member of the emergency management community. This includes public safety officials who serve as employees or contract agents of a government agency at the federal, state, local, or tribal level and are charged with protecting the public from hazards that are influenced by weather or weather-related events. Other members of this community include: safety and

emergency personnel, from universities or other large entities with large populations, whose roles are similar to the public safety officials, Skywarn Net Control Operators, such as Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES) and Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES).

- b. Government Partner. Government partners have missions that require close coordination with the NWS. Government partners include (but not limited to) the FAA, and water and land management officials.
- c. Member of the electronic media. Members of the electronic media are parties, and contract agents of parties, who operate systems that routinely and rapidly relay weather and water watches, advisories, warnings and forecast information to a significant part of the population served by an NWS office. Electronic media includes providers of weather content through electronic information distribution such as radio, television, internet, cellular, and other wireless means.
  - i. “Local” media members. Members of the media with local coverage or customer base shall register via the local WFOs or center with which they customarily collaborate. Approvals are granted by the field office or center.
  - ii. “National” Media members. Members of the media who provide weather news and information on a national level. Approvals are granted by the NWSChat manager.

Participants of NWSChat must agree to follow the Terms of Use (TOU) available on the NWSChat website. Agreement to the TOU is a pre-requisite to obtaining an account.

**c. Additional Information**

NWSChat sessions are stored in log formats. These chat logs are considered official NWS documents and are subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Chat sessions are public records and participants agree that their comments may be posted on NWS web sites and used in post-event surveys and assessments.