

## Abstract – Report out from Ad Hoc Committee on Naming Winter Storms – What’s in a Name?

Starting after AMS 2017 Seattle, under the charter of the Committee on the Effective Communication of Water and Climate Information (CECWCI) an ad hoc group has looked at the topic of naming winter storms, and what recommendations, if any, should be made to the weather enterprise. In 2011, after an October snowstorm impacted the East Coast, The Weather Channel (TWC) began investigating naming impactful storms, and eventually began naming winter storms full-time in the 2012 winter season (Palmer, 2013). While naming tropical systems has been common-place for decades, the practice of naming winter storms has led to numerous discussions, both within and external to the field. Discussions have centered around the practicality and need for naming winter storms, the usefulness for the general public and practitioners, and ultimately, who (if anyone) should be making wide-spread naming decisions which reach the public.

The ad-hoc committee has hosted four presentations via conference call or online . Our first presentation in June 2017 was by Tom Niziol with the Weather Channel. Tom shared the initial decision-making that led to starting to name winter storms in 2012 and lessons learned during the initial years. The main perceived benefit has been in the area of communications, especially on social media. Our second presentation was in October 2017 by members of the committee Jen Henderson, Adam Raine, Jen Sprague and Gina Eosco on ‘Social Science and Named Winter Storms.’ Results presented showed no significant difference in credibility and perceived severity of naming vs. not naming winter storms (Raine, 2017). Our third presentation in December 2017 was by Gerald Fleming from Met Eireann and Will Lang from the UK Met Office. They spoke about their experience with naming winter storms starting in Winter 2015-16 (since changed to year round). Their initial motivation was to take control of a messy situation where media was using different names for winter storms and to inject authority, to have an authoritative voice in the European network. Our fourth presentation in June 2018, was by Cara Cuite, Rutgers University, one of the authors of a paper entitled ‘Differing perceptions of hurricanes and nor’easters’ that was presented to the Society for Risk Analysis 2017. The paper found that given an evacuation order, people were less likely to heed it for a nor’easter than a hurricane. Additional work would need to be done to judge whether (or not) naming a storm contributed to this decision-making process. A fifth presentation is tentatively scheduled for mid-August 2018 with the current and former members of the Communications group in the UK Met Office as a follow-on to a presentation made at AMS 2018 Austin.

No consensus has emerged from the Ad Hoc group members on whether or not the US weather enterprise should adopt a winter storm naming process (which was Goal 1 of the document describing the purpose of the Ad Hoc group). There has not been strong evidence uncovered from the presentations that naming winter storms enhances safety. The information from multiple presenters has shown the major intent was to help frame communication delivery to the general public and decision-makers. Basic Internet searches show usage of the winter storm names beyond the Weather Channel, but how broad is that usage, and is it increasing or decreasing are questions that are not yet answered.

Some suggested next steps will be proposed at the presentation.