

# PHI SKYWARN Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

## November 1, 2008

- 1) This meeting was held at WFO PHI in Mount Holly, NJ and was called to order at 900 AM. Those in attendance were: Leon Grauer N0TAZ, Joe Miketta, Larry Nierenberg, Cully Phillips N3HTZ, Mike Patton W3MJP and Lou Ruh WX3I. Those participating by conference call were: Steve Bromhead KB2RTZ, Bill Byron N3VAE, Leslie Coale, Tony Mondaro, George Remhof KB3LJB, George Sabbi KC2GLG (ARRL Northern NJ Section and OKX CWA).
- 2) Nominations and voice vote were taken among the members present to elect a new Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary for the Advisory Committee. Lou Ruh was elected as the new Chairperson, Bill Byron was elected as the new Vice Chairperson, and Joe Miketta was elected as the new Secretary. These officers respectively replace Dennis Dura (who resigned last year), Lou Ruh and Dean Davison. These nominations and elections were conducted in accordance with guidelines established two years by the Skywarn Advisory Committee.
- 3) Lou Ruh discussed the status of the Skywarn Listservers. Art Martin designed and operated the original system, which deteriorated after a major computer crash in 2007. Art has been singlehandedly rebuilding the system ever since, but he wants to relinquish responsibility once it's back up and running full bore. Although Lou's time is somewhat limited with his new job responsibilities, he's willing to assume command of the system once Art hands it over. Joe Miketta mentioned an experimental message routing system being developed at NWS Headquarters which sends watches, warnings and statements (based on user-specified counties) to cell phones in real time. An advantage of this system is that paid personnel at NWS Headquarters are responsible for keeping this system running 24/7/365. Discussion took place concerning two disadvantages: the inability to send messages, and the inability to receive messages via email. Joe will send out an email to all members of the Advisory Committee which describes this experimental system. He suggested we all try it to see how we like it. Some of the identified deficiencies could be addressed by the NWS if enough users express concern.
- 4) Lou talked about National Skywarn Recognition Day, which this year will occur from 00Z to 24Z Saturday, December 6, 2008 (7PM December 5 to 7PM December 6). Lou asked for a voice vote from all members present to gauge interest in this year's participation...everyone voted "yes". Lou will be sending out more information in the weeks ahead, but in the meantime, anyone interested in learning more can visit the following website: <http://hamradio.noaa.gov>. Cully Phillips reminded everyone that folks interested in getting a certificate for this event will need to contact the event organizers. For QSL cards from the PHI station, contact Cully. Anyone interested in helping out the WX2PHI station during this event, please contact Lou (lou@wx3i.net).
- 5) Mike Patton provided an update concerning the Skywarn Amateur Radio Communications Center (SARCC). The purpose of the SARCC is to help the

NWS with routine and emergency communication traffic when widespread hazardous weather affects the PHI CWA. Volunteers also help NWS forecasters answer the phone. The SARCC is activated when the Storm Prediction Center (SPC) places parts of the PHI CWA under “moderate risk” of severe weather, which doesn’t happen very often. Discussion took place whether or not the SARCC should be activated for big winter storms as well. Joe and Larry Nierenberg mentioned that would be nice, but it’s difficult to get people to come into the NWS during big snow storms. Dean Davison used to volunteer, but he is no longer available since he moved out of the area. Mike mentioned that no one has contacted him during the past year regarding training to use this system, but if anyone does express an interest, they should contact him at W3MJP@arrl.net. Lou mentioned that a second radio is available for APRS, courtesy of Dennis Dura. However, a new antenna is needed and it has to be installed on the 10 meter tower outside the NWS Forecast Office, and a cable needs to be run between it and the SARCC inside the building. Lou hopes we can get this done in the next several months.

- 6) Larry Nierenberg provided a status report on the PHI Skywarn program. Larry had a busy spring, and this fall is active as well. He just conducted a training session in Berks County on Wednesday, October 29. Thanks to Ed Oswald W3DUB and Jeff Weidner for their assistance. Another training session is currently scheduled for November 13<sup>th</sup> in Kent County MD. Larry mentioned several new coordinators have been appointed during the past few months: Mark Chandler (New Castle DE), Ed Oswald (Berks PA), Brian Klock (Lehigh/Northampton PA), Tom Hurst (Atlantic NJ), Kevin Tuno (Burlington NJ) with Stephanie Matheson as assistant coordinator (Burlington, NJ), and John Burricelli (Sussex NJ) with Leslie Coale as assistant coordinator (Sussex NJ). He appreciates their help and support! Larry would like to get a training session scheduled for Philadelphia proper sometime this upcoming season, perhaps getting CBS-3 TV involved in the process. Cully wants a training session scheduled in Bucks County as well. Harry Woodworth, a former NWS forecaster, continues to do a fantastic job with culling the existing Skywarn database. Larry would rather have 100 reliable spotters listed in the database than 1000 unreliable spotters, so Harry is sending out letters and/or emails to all listed spotters to gauge their continued interest in the program. Larry is asking all county Skywarn coordinators to please contact him ([Larry.Nierenberg@noaa.gov](mailto:Larry.Nierenberg@noaa.gov)) if they know of any inactive spotters. Discussion took place concerning a three-year training requirement for spotters. Larry believes spotter training every three years is a reasonable request, and all members of the Advisory Committee present agreed. While no one will be removed from the database if they’re active spotters, if we haven’t heard from someone in three years and they don’t show up for training, they will be removed from the database. George Sabbi mentioned this is consistent with NWS OKX policy, and it has spurred greater interest in training. Lou asked about the status of E-Spotter. Larry stated that NWS HQ has mandated a moratorium on any new activity with E-Spotter until privacy issues can be resolved. Lou mentioned that spottersnetwork.org is very similar to E-Spotter, and would probably face the same NWS restrictions. Discussion also took place

- concerning online Skywarn training. Larry is not thrilled with this idea. While Larry doesn't have a problem with sharing certain information and slides online, he feels the personal contact that accompanies Skywarn training is very important. Finally, Joe mentioned that he will be targeting certain Spotters via email for snowfall reports this coming winter. No matter how much we make use of the Listservers, the WFO sometimes still has trouble getting snow reports, and targeted email requests helps with this situation.
- 7) Several questions arose concerning the use of IEM Chat among the Skywarn county coordinators, the NWS and the media. Joe mentioned that PHI is currently conducting an IEM Chat experiment with television media in certain markets, with mixed results. Some consideration has already been given to open IEM Chat to the Skywarn county coordinators, perhaps as a separate chat room. However, any such setup would NOT eliminate the need for coordinators and individual spotters to contact the NWS via more traditional means (i.e. phone, radio, email). Joe said one the most important benefits of the IEM Chat sessions is the Bot, which automatically lists all products issued by the NWS in chronological order, and provides a link to these products with the touch of the mouse button.
  - 8) Dan Hagarty, NWS ITO for NWS PHI, also serves as the Skywarn webmaster. If changes are necessary on the Skywarn homepage, he's the first person to contact ([Daniel.hagarty@noaa.gov](mailto:Daniel.hagarty@noaa.gov)). If you don't get a response in a reasonable amount of time, contact Larry Nierenberg ([Larry.Nierenberg@noaa.gov](mailto:Larry.Nierenberg@noaa.gov)), and he'll relay the message.
  - 9) Lou Ruh and Cully Phillips provided an update concerning the Thursday night nets. One purpose of these nets is to get people to check in so they know how to do it and how good the coverage is so that when they need to use it, they will know what it's all about. These nets also help everyone get to know everyone else involved with the program. Most of PHI's 34 county warning area is covered by the net. If there are problems with the links or with the signal, please contact Bill Ferguson WA3BXW ([wa3bwx@comcast.net](mailto:wa3bwx@comcast.net)). We greatly appreciate Bill's willingness to let us use his system for Skywarn. Currently there are between 30 and 40 check ins each week. These nets shouldn't take more than 30 or 40 minutes to complete. Operators should make sure they're on a good radio with good power and good signal. Lou will be soliciting help over the next few months with running the nets and making announcements.
  - 10) Discussion took place concerning the need for 3 Skywarn Advisory Committee meetings each year in addition to the annual Coordinators meeting. Tentative dates for the 2009 Coordinators meeting were established for either March 21 or March 22, most likely at the Burlington County complex across the street from the NWS. More information will be forthcoming in the next few months.
  - 11) Motion was made by Mike Patton to adjourn the meeting at 1215 PM, seconded by Larry Nierenberg. Thanks everyone for attending!