SKYWARN

SKYWARN is a program of the United States' National Weather Service (NWS). Its mission is to collect reports of localized severe weather. These reports are used to aid forecasters in issuing and verifying severe weather watches and warnings and to improve the forecasting and warning processes and the tools used to collect meteorological data. It consists of a network of severe storm spotters that observe weather conditions and make reports of severe weather to their local NWS offices. These spotters are regularly trained by personnel from the local NWS offices. In many areas, classes are conducted each spring in advance of the coming severe weather season.

Storm spotting

Where severe storms are possible, storm spotting groups such as SKYWARN in the United States coordinate amateur radio operators and localized spotters to keep track of severe thunderstorms and tornadoes. Reports from spotters and chasers are given to the National Weather Service so that they have ground truth information to warn the general public. Spotting provides ground information and localized conditions that the National Weather Service might not know the extent or might not otherwise be aware of. They typically report events, such as structures struck by lightning, rotating wall clouds, funnel clouds—or conditions that exceed specific thresholds, such as extremely strong winds, significant hail or very heavy rainfall. The exact reporting thresholds can vary by region and may even dynamically change during a severe weather event. Spotters also give reports during winter storms, floods, hurricanes, and wildfires.

The NWS sponsors SKYWARN training sessions in the US. These sessions usually occupy two hours and focus on hazard identification and communication along with spotter strategies and safety. NWS recommends attendance at refresher courses every two years

Connection to Amateur Radio

SKYWARN has long been associated with amateur radio. Many NWS offices maintain an amateur radio station that is manned by amateur radio operators during times of severe weather. This allows licensed amateur radio spotters to transmit their severe weather reports directly to the NWS and receive up-to-date severe weather updates even if regular communications are disrupted or overloaded by the weather emergency. It does, however, require 1) the cooperation of the local WFO, and 2) that the station actually be manned, live, in order for that to work. Depending upon a particular geographic location's capabilities, enthusiasm, and security restrictions, manning a WFO can sometimes prove to be a difficult idea. Ham radio nets can still operate to gather the information, and someone can still then relay that information over the telephone or the Internet.

The official Skywarn website is http://www.nws.noaa.gov/skywarn/
The Texas specific website is: http://www.skywarn.org/local-skywarn-groups/texas
Skywarn for in Williamson County is handled by Williamson County ARES
http://www.wc-ares.org
A list of TX Skywarn frequencies can be found at http://w9tec.com/chaseradio/tx.html