



THE ATMOSPHERIC RESERVOIR

Examining the Atmosphere and Atmospheric Resource Management

SUMMER

SEVERE WEATHER

Awareness Week

By Mark D. Schneider

It's not too early to talk about summer severe weather. In fact, two months ago on February 21, North Dakota's earliest severe hail report was recorded six miles north of Hettinger. The hail was one-inch in diameter which is the size criterion for reporting severe hail. Wind speeds of 58 miles per hour or greater qualify as another criterion for severe weather reporting. The National Weather Service (NWS) Bismarck and Grand Forks Weather Forecast Offices (WFO) will be participating in *Severe Weather Awareness Week* from April 24-28 and this is meant to be a timely refresher for both emergency managers and the public. A statewide tornado drill date is scheduled for April 26. According to confirmed severe weather reports, North Dakota receives an average of 22 tornadoes each year and an impressive 1,511 tornadoes were reported statewide between 1950 and 2015. Other historic reports during this 66-year period include the strongest non-tornadic wind gust of 143 miles per hour in Slope County and 5-inch diameter hailstones that fell in both Mercer and Sioux Counties!

John Paul Martin, Warning Coordination Meteorologist (WCM) at NWS Bismarck, compiled this information along with other severe weather statistics and it's available at <http://www.weather.gov/bis/ndtorhistory>. When asked what the most important thing the public can do during our upcoming summer severe weather season was, Martin commented, "It's vital that the public gives us severe weather reports; whether it be through our NWS Bismarck public phone line at (701) 223-4582 or by using the online reporting link on our website. Your severe weather report could prompt a warning for downstream communities that otherwise might not have been warned."



A tornado damaged the Taft elevator complex four miles north of Hillsboro on August 27, 2016. Photo courtesy of NWS Storm Survey.

Greg Gust, the WCM at NWS Grand Forks, agreed that, "If you're seeing severe weather occurring, don't keep it a secret, call it in. Sometimes people hear reports of severe weather from their family or friends and make reports that aren't factual because they're second hand, so make sure to confirm the details from someone who actually observed the severe weather." Gust also mentioned that aside from calling in reports, Facebook and Twitter are the quickest ways of reporting severe weather. If you live in the NWS Grand Forks forecast area, their public phone line is (701) 772-0720.

As a quick review, a severe thunderstorm or tornado "**watch**" means that conditions are favorable for the development of thunderstorms capable of producing large hail, strong winds, and possible tornadoes. A severe thunderstorm or tornado "**warning**" means that severe thunderstorms have developed and either a report of severe weather has been made or there are radar indicated conditions present.

So, check the batteries in your weather radio and get ready for North Dakota's summer severe weather season. Your severe weather reports help verify weather warnings and provide advanced notification to others that high impact, life threatening weather may be headed their way.

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