

Storm ready: Breaking down of the 2017 Severe Weather Summit

BY JACOB WOREK



The National Weather Service Forecast Office in Norman, OK, is located on the South Research Campus of the University of Oklahoma. The National Weather Center building opened in August 2006.

THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE can be a wonderful thing in the event world. The anticipation of “what’s next” is what makes watching a performance an engaging experience. How many people would commit time and money to attend an event if they knew what the next song, plot, or match winner was going to be? With live events, uncertainty is the magic ingredient that keeps people coming back again and again.

Unfortunately, uncertainty can also have significant downsides, particularly when it comes to weather. The mild spring day that’s been forecasted all week can end up being hot, humid, and miserable. Thunderstorms that were projected to miss your event site can suddenly make an untimely and unwelcome appearance. If you’re not prepared to respond to all potential weather scenarios, you’re putting your audience and crew at risk.

This past March, dozens of industry professionals took the next step in improving their weather planning knowledge by attending the Event Safety Alliance (ESA)’s third-annual Severe Weather Summit. Held each March at the National Weather Center in Norman, OK, the Severe Weather Summit is a two-day examination of meteorological phenomena and how event professionals can mitigate its impact. Led by experts from the National Weather Service and the live event industry, the program aims to improve attendees’ awareness of the threats they face and provide them with the tools necessary to effectively plan for a variety of severe weather emergencies.

The Severe Weather Summit is loosely divided into three sections. In section one, a collection of professional meteorologists built a foundation of weather knowledge on which participants could start creating a severe weather action plan. University of Oklahoma Office of Emergency Preparedness Meteorologist Dr. Kevin Kloesel introduced attendees to the primary weather risks impacting live

events, including tornadoes, hurricanes, lightning, wind, and extreme heat, exploring the climatology of each phenomena, and providing examples of venues that experienced each in the past. He also explained why you should never play amateur meteorologist and rely on weather “apps” to guide your decision making process.

With the primary risks outlined, professional meteorologist and past President of the National Weather Association Dr. John Scala explained the fundamentals of forecasting and Doppler radar, and examined the many myths and misconceptions people have about the weather. National Weather Service Meteorologist Steven Piltz then closed out the first section of the Severe Weather Summit with a minute by minute examination of actual weather incidents that



Dr. Kevin Kloesel opened section one of the Severe Weather Summit discussing the primary weather risks impacting live events.



Hadden Hipsley covered section two of the Summit delivering a primer on how to build a severe weather action plan.

have impacted live events from the meteorologist’s perspective, using radar images to point out areas of concern and the decisions that were made in response.

Section two of the Severe Weather Summit was focused on how to utilize the knowledge gleaned in the first section to the development of severe weather action plans. Attorney and ESA Vice President Steven Adelman set the stage by describing event organizers’ legal obligations in regards to planning, and what they personally are (and are not) responsible for. Following Adelman, Lambda Productions President Hadden Hipsley delivered a primer on building severe weather action plans, sharing numerous insights he’s gleaned from his experience as production manager for Bonnaroo, Firefly, and Electric Forest. He discussed the considerations one should make when developing their plan, who should be involved in the planning process, and the importance of training and communication when rolling out the program. He also introduced the concept of creating a weather decision matrix (trigger chart), why simplicity is the key to an effective plan, and why one should never take a “one size fits all” approach to planning.

In the final section, attendees were tasked with developing a weather decision matrix for their own facility or event using the weather and planning concepts discussed in the first two sections. Subject matter experts were on hand to answer questions and provide personalized advice and feedback to attendees. Plans

were then reviewed in class, with group discussion on additional considerations or actions that may be taken. Closing out the Severe Weather Summit, Dr. Kloesel shared a personal case study of a weather event affecting the University of Oklahoma campus, and the considerations that needed to be made when determining whether to delay or postpone a very high-profile event.

For information about the 2018 Severe Weather Summit and other Event Safety Alliance programs, please visit <http://eventsafetyalliance.org>. ■



Section three included the opportunity for small group discussions with subject matter experts to answer questions and provide feedback to attendees.



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