Advanced Spotter Training 2009

Lesson 9: Operating as Part of a Group

From Last Time

- We discussed the skills of the individual spotter.
- We discussed spotter safety.
- We discussed how to stay ready.

This Time

- We will describe how you fit in with an existing network.
- We will explore network operations.
- We will discuss how a network prepares for these operations.

Homework Review

Go over the homework problems from last time:

- Develop a storm plan for your home.
- Make up a storm kit (First Aid kit, weather radio, blankets, bottled water, canned and dried food, any medication you take, etc.) and make sure there is enough for three days.
- Locate sources of weather information.

Homework Review *(continued)*

- List several sources you can consult to determine if severe weather is possible in your area on a day-to-day basis. Develop a spotter kit as outlined above.
- Determine what you intend to bring with you.
- Find, or draw, pictures of each of the storm features mentioned.
- Explain their significance.

Being Part of a Network

The advantages of a network of spotters acting as a group versus a solitary spotter are many:

- More ground can be covered.
- There is a faster response to changing situations.
- Reporting is streamlined.
- There is increased safety.

Being Part of a Network *(continued)*

Being a spotter in a group has certain responsibilities:

- You can't just charge after a storm you see on the horizon.
- People need to know where you are and where you are going.
- You need to discuss your plans with the base, so that your part can be integrated into the overall operation.

Being Part of a Network *(continued)*

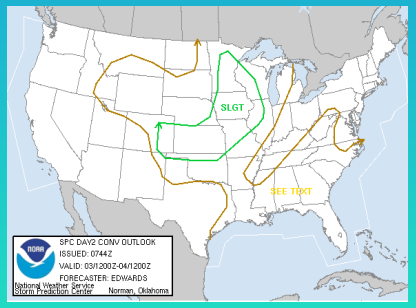
- The base is your lifeline.
- You will be reporting to the base and you will be getting crucial information from it.
- Not only does the network communicate information about the storm, but also information about road conditions, damage, what other spotters are doing in your vicinity, and ideas about how to approach a storm.

First Discussion!

- Think about how you can tailor your activities to fit in with your group.

Network Operations

Network Activation, Deployment, and Reporting



Getting the Word Out

- The single biggest hurdle is getting a network up and running.
- Phone calls are completely impractical for more than four members in a spotter group.
- It is possible to have calling assignments; the base calls you, you then call three people on your list, each of them calls others, etc.

Getting the Word Out *(continued)*

- The drawback is that if one person is away, or otherwise unavailable, that part of the network doesn't come up.
- Another method is to have people monitor the weather radio or convective outlooks and mesoscale discussions and have an established procedure when an alert goes out to call the base.

Getting the Word Out *(continued)*

- Another method is to broadcast alerts over a radio and have the members monitoring the radio.
- You can also create email groups where alerts go out across the Internet.
- Most likely you will not rely on only one method.

Network Deployment

There are basically three types of deployments of spotters. You will usually be dealing with more than one at a time:

- *Static Deployments*: Spotters will deploy at a specific place and will operate in and around that location. This has the advantage of reliability in terms of location, but is limited in flexibility to respond to changing situations.

Network Deployment *(continued)*

- ***Mobile Static Deployments*: Spotters will deploy to specific remote sites and spot from there. This will work well for those who travel by bike, motorcycle, or other means of transportation that does not lend itself to full-fledged mobile spotting. This has the reliability advantage of static spotting, and with some ability to redeploy as the situation warrants (assuming it is safe to do so).**

Network Deployment *(continued)*

- Mobile Deployments: Spotters will operate from vehicles as required. This has the greatest flexibility, and the greatest risk.
- All deployments must be tailored to meet threats.
- When you are briefed on the severe weather situation, make certain that you know the general direction that severe weather is likely to approach from.

Network Reporting

The biggest advantage of a network is the quantity of information it can develop about a storm. Information can come from three sources:

- *Land Lines*: Here a spotter calls in a report over the phone lines. Unless you have several lines this will become a "choke-point" during severe weather.

Network Reporting *(continued)*

- *Cell Phones*: This allows mobile spotters to use the phone lines to call in their reports from anywhere there is cell service. It has the same disadvantage as the land line. Another development along these lines is mobile Internet and email reports. Assuming the email servers respond quickly this allows the spotter to send accurate reports with photos or even short videos attached.

Network Reporting *(continued)*

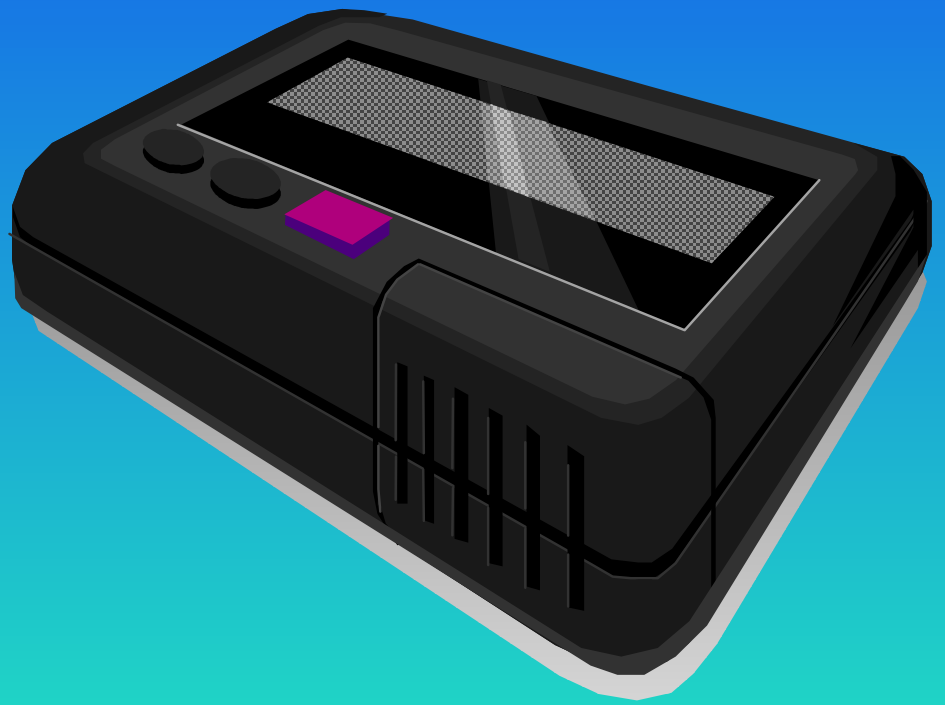
- *Radio*: Here a spotter will call into the base using a radio. This is the best choice since it allows for rapid communications, and everyone else with a radio can hear what is going on. Those spotters without radios can still use scanners to get storm information and land lines or cell phones to call in reports.

Network Reporting *(continued)*

- The base takes the information from spotters and passes it on to other spotters and the NWS (and possibly the 911 center).
- It is important that the base provide its spotters with good information about what is happening with the weather (we will discuss this in greater detail in the final lesson).

Second Discussion!

- Contemplate what sort of communications gear to use in a spotter network.



Section 3

Preparing for Network Operations

Testing Communications Techniques

- The first task of a spotter network is to train its members in the proper use of communications equipment and those procedures specific to the network.
- Whenever you acquire new members try to arrange a communications exercise just to practice methods of communications.
- Make sure that all members are familiar with standard contact procedures.

Testing Communications Techniques *(continued)*

- Make sure all of your communications equipment is in good working order.
- Get spare battery packs as necessary.

Network Exercises

- In order to be prepared, every network should stage exercises of varying complexity.
- It might be a good idea to check with your local emergency management organization to try and cooperate with one of their training operations.

Network Exercises *(continued)*

There are two basic types of exercises for training:

- *Map Exercise*: This is where the participants sit down with a map and examine what they think they will do in various situations. This is a good way to test coordination and judgement skills.

Network Exercises *(continued)*

- ***Field Exercise***: This is where some or all of the network actually deploys to test response time, coordination, communications, and the ability for the base to operate effectively.

At least one field exercise should be done each year, and there should be at least two map sessions.

Network Mentoring

There is no substitute for experience. All the training in the world will not help if there is no experience. I suggest three types of experience-building training:

- Ride-Alongs: After a spotter has completed their training pair them up with an experienced spotter on an actual deployment. After a few of these deployments the spotter will have gained valuable confidence and experience.

Network Mentoring *(continued)*

- Static Mentoring: If there are not enough mobile spotters, then pair the new spotter with an experienced static spotter.
- Base Mentoring: If the spotter is interested in base operations (or even if they are not) have them sit in at the base at least once (it is an eye-opening experience).

Network Post-Mortem

The best way to stay on top of skills and problems is to examine what you did right and what you did wrong in actual deployments.

Choose someone to make a detailed briefing about what happened and have everyone present to analyze each situation.

This allows each spotter to test their knowledge and skills against real events.

Network Post-Mortem *(continued)*

Here is what to expect at such a post-mortem:

- A survey of the weather conditions that produced (or failed to produce) severe weather.
- A rough chronology of events, decisions, and actions taken or prevented.
- A brief explanation of what each spotter did or did not do.

Network Post-Mortem *(continued)*

- Recommendations for how to improve things in the future.

Final Discussion!

- Discuss the good and bad habits that networks can generate.

Homework Due Next Week

- Think about how you can best operate within a group as a spotter.
- What method(s) would you prefer for being contacted. What method(s) do you think are most realistic?
- What style of deployment would you be able to perform?
- What is the form of communications you will most often use?
- How would you develop a relay for spotters out of range of a radio base?

Homework Due Next Week *(continued)*

- What exercises would you recommend for the coming year? What exercises are you most likely to participate in?
- How often should a post-mortem be done on a severe weather event?