March, 2002

## Inflight Advisories - Timely and accurate aviation weather warnings from the NWS

"Attention all aircraft..." begins the ATC announcement that describes a weather hazard that may well impact flight operations and flight safety. The controller reads the Navaids and airports that outline the area for a Convective SIGMET. Any conversation among the crew or passengers stops, and eyes become fixed in a gaze of concentration The duty now is to form a mental picture of the area described. Then quickly, the task becomes that of assessing the short term impact of these thunderstorms.

SIGMETs, Convective SIGMETs, and AIRMETs are Inflight Advisories that are skillfully and meticulously maintained for aviation safety by forecasters at the Aviation Weather Center. Convective SIGMETs are short term aviation warnings for thunderstorms that pose a danger to all aircraft. Here are the basics:
A. Meteorological criteria

1. Severe thunderstorms due to: a. surface wind gusts greater than or equal to 50 knots.
b. hail at the surface equal to or greater than $3 / 4$ " in diameter.
c. tornadoes.
2. Embedded thunderstorms.
3. Lines of thunderstorms.
4. Thunderstorms greater than or equal to Level 4 affecting $40 \%$ or more of an area that is 3,000 square miles in size.
B. Issuance and valid times
5. issued hourly at $\mathrm{H}+55$.
6. valid for 2 hours, but replaced hourly.
3.outlook portion valid 2 to 6 hours discusses technical aspects that are producing the thunderstorms.
7. numbered sequentially beginning at 0000 UTC
8. uses Navaids to locate the threat.
9. uses 3 sections of the country West, Central, and East to reduce the size of each hourly bulletin W, C, or E are appended to the number to denote the section of the country for which they apply.


Figure 1. If you could "see" Inflight Advisories in effect on any day, you may wonder just how free you are to choose your altitude and route without encountering weather problems.

In this issue:

Anatomy of Convective SIGMETs

Center Weather Advisories

- The Inflight Advisory that augments Convective SIGMETs

NCWF - National Convective Weather Forecast - a graphical Nowcast tool

Sectorized plotting charts

- new compact tools for the cockpit for locating Inflight Advisory areas

Mission Statement
To enhance aviation safety by increasing the pilots' knowledge of weather systems and processes and National Weather Service products and services.

All pilots need to keep current on weather. That's just common sense, and that includes keeping abreast of Inflight Advisories, since there is no more urgent product issued for pilots. Yet, a review of the FAA test questions for Private Pilot/ Flight Instructor, Instrument, and Commercial ratings shows that there are no questions that test a pilot's ability to actually interpret any Inflight Advisory.

The very few questions about Convective SIGMETs that do exist focus mainly on the issuance criteria. That's like asking a pilot, "when is an altimeter used" and not providing simulated altimeter depictions to test the pilot's ability to interpret this crucial instrument.

The Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM), section 7-1-5 does a pretty good job of describing SIGMETs and Convective SIGMETs. Perhaps a graphic explaining the content of Convective SIGMETs would be more helpful. That's the focus of the following pages.

When Inflight Advisories were first introduced, the only source was Flight Service, and that was verbal. Gradually, DUATS matured giving pilots their first direct access to NWS products. Then private vendors created airport weather terminals for use at FBOs. Today the Internet delivers a plethora of weather text products, maps, and graphics to pilots. Does just having them available mean that pilots can remain current with these products? Perhaps, but let's study a couple of Inflight Advisories, namely Convective SIGMETs and Center Weather Advisories and get reacquainted.

The AWC home page,
http://aviationweather.noaa.gov/
has menu options on the left-hand side that take you directly to the Convective SIGMET page shown in Figure 2. The current WSTs are plotted in red, and outlooks are plotted in green. Options at the bottom of that page offer two other map displays as well as the ability to display the text message only.

The text versions can be plotted on the AWC's advisory plotting chart shown in Figure 3. That chart is available at:

## http://aviationweather.noaa.gov/awc/ advsry/advsrypltn.html

The anatomy of a Convective SIGMET is shown in Figure 4 on the next page. The individual advisories shown there are the ones plotted in Figure 3.

Convective SIGMETs (WST)


Figure 2. The Convective SIGMET page displays plots of WSTs in red and outlook areas in green. The map can be divided into east and west portions using the clickable tabs below the map. Text versions of the Convective SIGMETs are also available using the three tabs near the bottom of the page. Access it from the AWC home page, or go direct to this page with: http://aviationweather.noaa.gov/awc/awc-wsts.html


Figure 3. The Inflight Advisory plotting chart is used by Aviation Weather Center to graphically depict the location of SIGMETs, Convective SIGMETs, and AIRMETs. The Convective SIGMETs shown in Figure 4 on the next page are plotted here.


Figure 4. Convective SIGMETs consist of a warning section on top, each of which is sequentially numbered, and an outlook section below. The numbered areas refer to the warning areas in the same order.
"Intensifying area of severe thunderstorms moving from 240 degrees at 45 knot. leval 4-5 Zero. Wind gusts to 60 knots reported. Tornadoes, hail to 2 inches in diameter, wind gusts to 65 knots possible in the North Dakota portion."
"Isolated severe thunderstorm, 30 nautical miles in diameter moving from 250 degrees knots. Tops above -ghl 2 inco diameter. Wind gusts to 55 knots possible.
"Line of severe thunderstorms 25 miles wide moving from 270 degrees at 45 knots. above fight level es Wind gusts to 65 knots possible.
"Severe thunderstorms continue to develop in the area over North Dakota. Area is expected to remain severe and spread into Minnesota as strong positive vorticity advection moves over very nstable airmass char acterized by a minus 12 lifted index."
"Isolated strong thunderstorms will continue ovr eastern Kansas and northwestern Missouri through the forecast as divergence level trough moves northeastward over very unstable airmass. he minus 9 to minus 10 range.."

Several Convective SIGMETs can be listed in each hourly bulletin if convection stretches over a wide area and if the clusters of thunderstorms are distinct from each other.

These bulletins consist of a warning section on top, in which each Convective SIGMET is sequentially numbered. Below that is an outlook section which is a concise short term forecast (up to 6 hours) for each respective area of thunderstorms. It's carefully crafted by AWC forecasters using satellite cloud motion and motion vectors from NWS NEXRAD data, as well as model output from the RUC (Rapid Update Cycle), ETA, MesoETA, and AVN atmospheric models. The numbered outlook areas are listed in the same sequence as the warnings above. In other words, Area 1 in the outlook refers to Convective SIGMET 20C.

Technical terms are used in this outlook section, and discuss the most important meteorological features that are contributing to the thunderous disruptions of air traffic.

Normally, Convective SIGMETs serve the country quite well. Sometimes though, a thunderstorm develops rapidly in an area of high traffic volume, or a portion of a storm cluster will affect a large terminal and disrupt the tight flow of traffic. One of these particular storms may
not meet Convective SIGMET criteria, but it may pose a problem for Air Traffic Control.

Center Weather Advisories (CWA) are another type of Inflight Advisory and were created for this very purpose. CWAs are equal in urgency to Convective SIGMETs but are issued by Center Weather Service Units (CWSU) in the Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCC). The function of the CWA is to provide real time help when adverse weather erupts or covertly evolves.

Figure 5 is a diagramed example of a CWA. CWAs may augment existing Convective SIGMETs, in which case that fact will be stated in the CWA as shown in Figure 5. CWSU forecasters are direct resources for ATC controllers but are not a pilot's alternative to Flight Watch.

CWAs are available on the AWC web site in the section called the CWSU Corner. Start again at the AWC home page:

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http://aviationweather.noaa.gov/
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Figure 6 shows that home page and where to click to access the CWSU Corner and other AWC products and services.

Figure 7 is the CWSU Corner page. Clicking on the dot under the ARTCC IDs will display any CWAs in effect for that Center at the top left corner of the page.

A new automated tool arrived on the
aviation scene in October, 2001. The National Convective Weather Forecast (NCWF) in Figure 9 depicts six level radar data on a map with ARTCC boundaries and hub airports. To zoom in on one of the hubs, click on the appropriate button at the bottom of the map. The NCWF looks for max reflectivity areas and then projects a one hour future location with a polygon similar to the way that AWC forecasters create the outlook portion of the Convective SIGMET. While the NCWF could be a parallel to the Convective SIGMET program, work is ongoing to assess its performance.

Most pilots have heard Convective SIGMETs read either directly by the controller or by changing to the HIWAS frequency. Controllers will normally summarize the area concerned. But if the controller chooses to read the points that outline the area of thunderstorms, it may be hard to quickly visualize where the area is. This task is nearly impossible if the current flight plan has you in an unfamiliar part of the country.

Does that WST straddle the course between two waypoints that you have entered into your GPS?

One way to find out is take out an en route chart, unfold it and search for the VORs just mentioned. Maybe you need to flip the chart over, or get another one out

> ARTCC ID, ZKC is Kansas City Center.
> The " 2 " is a phenomenon number for a meteorologically uniqure event. There are normally only 6 numbers used, and they begin numbering each day at 00 UTC. Urgent Center Weather Advisory Issued 22nd day of the month at 1913 UTC

## 2nd line of header

The " 2 " in " 203 " is the phenomenon number, a distinct area of thunderstorms. The " 3 " is the number of the CWA pertaining to this phenomenon. In other words, this is the 3rd CWA issued for this storm (phenomenon 2). This would be done only if the storm persisted, did not meet Convective SIGMET criteria, but was signficant enough to impact the normal flow of air traffic.
Expiration time, 22nd day of the month at 2113 UTC.
/D ZKC2 UCWA 221913
ZKC CWA 203 VALID UNTIL 222113

## 32W MKC

ISOLD LVL 6 TSTM (EXTREME) DIAM 30 NM MOVG FROM 25020KT. TOP TO FL550. TSTM WILL MOV OVR MKC BTWN 2030 UTC AND 2100 UTC. WND GUSTS TO 51 KTS RPTD. SEE CONVECTIVE SIGMET 2 IC.

## "32 nm west of Kansas City VOR (MKC)

Isolated level 6 thunderstorm (extreme) 30 nm in diameter moving from 250 degrees at 20 knots. Tops to Flight Level 5-5-Zero. Thunderstorm will move over MKC between 2030 UTC and 2100 UTC. Wind gusts to 51 knots reported. See Convective SIGMET 21C."

Figure 5. Anatomy of a Center Weather Advisory (CWA). CWAs are issued by Center Weather Service Units (CWSUs) for weather threats that are either not covered by SIGMETs or Convective SIGMETs or to add important details for safe and efficient movement of air traffic by ATC.

| PAZA - Anchorage | ZLA - Los Ageles |
| :--- | :--- |
| ZAB - Albuqurque | ZLC - Salt Lake |
| ZAU - Chicago | ZMA - Miami |
| ZBW - Boston | ZME - Memphis |
| ZDC - Washington | ZMP - Minneapolis |
| ZDV - Denver | ZNY - New York |
| ZFW - Fort Worth | ZOA - Oakland |
| ZHU - Houston | ZOB - Cleveland |
| ZID - Indianapolis | ZSE - Seattle |
| ZJX - Jacksonville | ZTL - Atlanta |
| ZKC - Kansas City |  |

Air traffic control center IDs used in the headers of Center Weather Advisories.


Figure 6. Convective SIGMET maps and text are available with a single click. Two other useful links are available. The CWSU corner will reveal Center Weather Advisories. The National Convective Weather Forecast (NCWF) is a new automated product used to forecast movements of thunderstorms.
of the flight case wedged behind the seat.
What's really needed is some way to easily locate the hazard areas without clutter or confusion in the cockpit, especially when you're in the terminal environment, or in a hold upstream from your destination.

What if you had a compact map that clipped right on the yoke or to your knee


Figure 7 . The CWA Corner page at AWC offers Center Weather Advisories .
board? What if the map served as a quick reference and kept the cockpit clutter-free so you could perform your primary duties without distraction? Would you then take the time to locate the hazard that you just received from HIWAS?

The maps on the following pages should help with that. The AWC's advisory plotting chart has been divided into
three separate maps, each covering one of the Convective SIGMET sections, West, Central, and East. There is some overlap into the adjoining sections.

The list of Navaids also has been sectorized. Only those that are in or near each section are listed. So your search for the Navaids will be reduced considerably.

With these pages, you can make your


Figure 8. The National Convective Weather Forecast (NCWF) is a new operational tool used to forecast very short term movements of thunderstorms.
own Inflight Advisory plotting chart. Here's how. Make a photocopy or a printer copy of the maps for any section (West, Central, or East). Load that map back in the copier or printer so the next copy will be on the back side. Then print or photocopy the page of Navaids for that section
onto the backside of the maps. You may have to do this a couple times to get the maps and Navaid list to be oriented correctly.

If done correctly, you'll get two slightly different plotting charts. One will have the map on one side, and the list of plotting points upside down on the back. The two circles will be at the top on both the front and the back. This map can be clipped to the yoke of your aircraft or on your knee board. When ATC reads the Navaids and airports for an Inflight Advisory, you'll be able to locate them easily on this sectorized chart. If you're unfamiliar with any or all of the Navaids, simply flip up the map and find them in the list on the back. They'll be oriented so you can read them without removing the chart from the yoke clip or knee board.

The other chart that you've made with this process is intended to be filed in a three ring flight book like those in which you might keep instrument approach procedure charts.. On this map, the Navaids and airports are readable merely by turning the page as you would in any book. Which map you choose is purely a matter of personal preference. These maps have been added to the bottom of the AWC page shown in Figure 2.

Until cockpit data uplinks are common in all aircraft, pilots will need a way to locate and follow Inflight Advisories without affecting the primary task of safe flying and good cockpit management. Techniques learned here should help.

## Coming up next time...

## Explaining the indices and tech terms found in Convective SIGMETs <br> Web sources where these observed and forecast indices can be found so pilots can get a jump on convective potential for the day.

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http://www.crh.noaa.gov/crh/aviation/ thefront.html





























