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To: "E - All WRD Employees"<distribution@usgs.gov>  
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Subject: WRD MEMORANDUM--PROJECT ALERT  
Cc: "File WRD Archive, , Reston, VA" <wrld-archive@usgs.gov>

In Reply Refer To:  
Mail Stop 440

February 26, 1996

WATER RESOURCES DIVISION MEMORANDUM NO. 96.15

SUBJECT: PROGRAMS AND PLANS--Project Alert: Disseminating information about floods, droughts, and other significant hydrologic events to the public

This memorandum has two purposes. The first is to emphasize the importance of making Project Alert information convenient and available for use by local, State, and Federal agencies and the news media. The second is to highlight the value of Project Alert information in making policy officials aware of our role and contributions in emergency situations. Project Alert is a natural and critical part of our growing outreach efforts.

The first priority for reporting extreme and (or) significant hydrologic events as well as hazardous or potentially hazardous conditions--such as rapidly rising streams and roads and bridges already, or about to be, inundated --must be to local emergency-response agencies and to the public via local news media. District offices are responsible for getting out the word on events and conditions that are within the purview of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and that have been observed and documented by USGS personnel.

The choice of the most effective method for disseminating the information--direct contact with cooperators and (or) the media, through the World Wide Web, etc.--will depend in part on local circumstances and is left to the discretion of the local manager.

As we go about informing the local authorities and populace, it is equally important to send copies of statements/news releases by electronic mail to Headquarters (email to userid <project\_alert>). They are used here to inform the Director, the Department of the Interior and the Congress of critical natural events and our role in dealing with them. Our message to you is simple: 1) Communicate quickly to local officials and local media, 2) share the information with Headquarters through Project Alert, and 3) keep this information very brief and simple.

Attachment 1 provides some tips for writing Project Alert documents. Examples of such documents are included in attachment 2. Questions about preparing news releases? Call the Public Affairs Office at (703) 648-4460. They also can help in compiling a list of media outlets in your State.

/signed/

John N. Fischer  
Acting Assistant Chief Hydrologist  
for Water Information

2 Attachments

Distribution: E

This memorandum does not supersede any previous WRD memorandum.

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Attachment 1

Tips in describing significant hydrologic events and our role in dealing with them:

1. The first paragraph should be a single sentence that summarizes the situation and the USGS role. This is the most important sentence in your statement. What is happening on a stream near one's home or business--and its effect on that home or business--is of much greater local interest than USGS activities on a State, regional, or national network level.
2. In the statement forwarded via project\_alert, describe the hydrologic conditions of concern as briefly as possible. Details about flood damages, or of what emergency response agencies have done or are doing, are not within purview of the USGS and thus we do not need to report them as part of project alert.
3. Keep the language non-technical and express the quantities in terms that are familiar to your anticipated audience. Use units that you think your audience will find familiar. That could be cubic feet per second, million gallons per day, or acre-feet per day. Once you select your unit of measurement, stay with it throughout the text. Try to use the common word: "flow" instead of "discharge"; "average" rather than "normal" or "median." To add interest to the write-up, you could translate a flow rate into an amount of time it would take to fill a known volume. For example: "At its peak flow rate, the waters of the Potomac River at Great Falls could have filled RFK stadium to the brim in 2 minutes." Try to include stage information, such as the relation of measured or anticipated peak stage to historical high stages or to the elevations of bridges, roadways, or other structures, and any USGS observations of inundated areas or facilities. Many readers will be able to relate to stage/elevation figures more easily than to discharge. Pictures and graphs, when available, pay large dividends.
4. If recurrence intervals are mentioned in the text, they need a definition and a caveat. We suggest something like the following: "A 50-year flood is one that has a 1 in 50 chance of being exceeded in any given year. However, the fact that a 50-year flood has just happened does not affect the chances of it happening again in the near future."
5. To indicate the role of the USGS in the "larger picture" and the importance and use of the data that WE collect, it is important to include in the latter part of the statement general information such as that shown in example 5 below.

6. Where appropriate, add words such as the following: "Note to Editors" USGS hydrologists will be making flow measurements at highway US 15 at Point of Rocks, Maryland on Monday, February 5. For information on their schedule for photo opportunities, contact \_\_\_\_\_ at (410)-xxx-xxxx."

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Attachment 2

EXAMPLE 1 --  
POTOMAC RIVER ADVISORY  
(This kind of information can be called in to wire services such as the Associated Press and is the quickest way to get an initial story out.)

Tues., Jan. 17, 1995

At 2 p.m., Tues., Jan. 17, 1995, flow of the Potomac River near Washington, D.C., was nearly 60 bgd (billion gallons per day), more than eight times the long-term average flow for January of 7.2 bgd, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

EXAMPLE 2 --  
POTOMAC RIVER LOW-FLOW ADVISORY  
(up but still below normal)

Mon., May 1, 1995, 3 p.m.

In response to the rains that fell on Sun., April 30, flow of the Potomac River has increased, but is still below normal Mon., May 1, 1995. At 3 p.m., flow of the Potomac near Washington, D.C., was about 3.9 billion gallons per day (bgd), well below the long-term April flow of 10.4 bgd, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

EXAMPLE 3 --  
NORTHEAST STREAMFLOWS UPDATE

Streamflows in the Northeastern U.S. continue to decline, despite some scattered showers in the region, according to hydrologists at the U.S. Geological Survey, an agency of the Department of the Interior.

The following flows on two major rivers in the Northeast were measured at USGS monitoring stations. All numbers are expressed in millions of gallons per day.

River	Flow	Long-Term Aug. Average Flow	% Below Average
Hudson River at Hadley, NY	628 mgd (8-2-95)	773 mgd	20%
Musquehanna River	3995 mgd	7445 mgd	50%

at Harrisburg, Pa. (8-3-95)

EXAMPLE 4 --

NORTH PLATTE RIVER FLOW MORE THAN 50 PERCENT BELOW NORMAL IN AUGUST

Flow of the North Platte River at the U.S. Geological Survey streamgage near Sinclair, Wyoming, was more than 50 percent below normal throughout August, averaging 184 cubic feet per second (cfs) for the month, according to USGS hydrologists. The long-term average August flow at this station is 472 cfs.

As shown in the graph, the highest daily streamflow during August was 279 cfs on Aug. 3. The lowest flow measured during August was 116 cfs on Aug. 29

EXAMPLE 5 (Regional Flood -- too lengthy for the day of the flood but perhaps, later)

STREAMFLOW RECORDS SET BY FLOODING IN GEORGIA

Many all-time high flows have occurred at U.S. Geological Survey stream-gaging stations in central and south Georgia as a result of the ongoing flooding that began July 4, 1994, according to hydrologists at the USGS office in Atlanta, Ga.

So far, the following records (in terms of flow measured in billions of gallons per day) have been set on the mainstem of the Flint River and the Ocmulgee River.

Stream	New Record	Previous Record	Period of Record
Flint River at Albany, Ga.	78 bgd - July 11	59 bgd	101 years
Flint River near Culloden, Ga.	65 bgd - July 6	59 bgd	71 years
Flint river at Montezuma, Ga.	97 bgd - July 8	63 bgd	90 years
Ocmulgee River near Jackson, Ga. (flow met previous record)	45 bgd - July 6	45 bgd	41 years
Ocmulgee River at Macon, Ga.	74 bgd - July 7	54 bgd	102 years
Ocmulgee River at Hawkinsville, GA.	65 bgd - July 10	51 bgd	86 years

100-year flood event or greater occurred at each of these USGS stream-gaging

stations. A 100-year flood is one that would be exceeded on the long-term average of once every 100 years. However, the fact that a 100-year flood has just happened does not affect the chances of it's happening again in the near future.

As the Nation's largest water-information agency, the USGS monitors surface-water and ground-water resources at more than 45,000 sites across the Nation, including 209 stream-gaging stations in Georgia.

During floods, flow data are used by the Corps of Engineers to manage water projects such as diversions, dams, and locks. The National Weather Service and emergency management agencies use the data for flood warning and flood forecasting purposes, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency uses the data as part of its nationwide floodplain mapping and flood-insurance program.

----- End of Forwarded Message

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