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A COMPUTERIZED SPOTTER DATABASE USING THE WINDOWS CARDFILE

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1.   Introduction

While technological advances continue to improve the National Weather Service's warning program, there is and always will be a need for ground-truth information from spotters and other local observers. Contacting those in areas that are affected by severe weather is crucial both during and after the event.

Using Windows and its Cardfile program, a severe weather contact database was created for use in obtaining real-time ground truth information and for post-event damage survey and verification efforts. The database is easy to create and can be tailored to the needs of any office.

This paper will not attempt to outline every step in the creation of a Cardfile database. The "Help" feature contained within Cardfile offers step-by-step information on creating, editing and using the Cardfile program. Instead we hope to illustrate the benefits of the computerized database and show the utility and versatility of the Cardfile program in such an application.

2.   Requirements

In order to make use of this tool, you will need the following:

a.   a personal computer running Windows and the Cardfile accessory,
b.   a modem, and
c.   a telephone connected to the modem

The computer used for the database might be the same computer used for warnings, or it could be a separate computer located adjacent to the SRWARN computer. The modem is used to dial the telephone number contained in the index line of each card, and the telephone is, of course, used to talk to the contact after Cardfile has auto-dialed their number.

3.   Collecting the Data

The first step in creating the database was to update the existing severe weather contacts. This involved not only verifying the contacts that were already in use, but also obtaining new contacts, both for the current and future County Warning Areas (CWA).

The new contacts were found through a variety of sources, but most came from an exhaustive search through area telephone directories at the local library. This search yielded many new severe weather contacts, and when these were combined with the existing contacts, they totalled over 1500. Traditional (police, fire, utility) contacts, as well as some new (post offices, parks, airports) contacts were used for the contact list.

4. Using the Cardfile Database

The Windows Cardfile is basically a computerized stack of index cards that gives you quick reference to names, addresses, phone numbers and any other information included on the card. You can even include maps, drawings or other figures on the cards. The ease in retrieval of Cardfile information makes it an ideal tool for accessing information when time is critical (i.e., during severe weather).

In setting up the database, separate Windows icons were created for each of the four states in which we will have warning responsibility. Clicking on any of the state icons activates the Cardfile program. Within each state, separate files were created for each county. When the county file is opened, a cascaded stack of index cards appears, with the "active" card on top of the stack.

A separate card was created for each contact point in each county. The top line of the card (the index line) contains the name and phone number of the contact. The larger, bottom portion of the card was used to include addresses, alternate phone numbers and other information, such as exact location within the county, operating hours, etc. Some counties had 30 to 40 cards, while other, more rural counties only had 5 to 10. An example of the cards is shown in Figure 1.

The Cardfile program makes it easy to call contacts from the database. Simply select the proper card and press the F5 key. The program then dials the number automatically, including any system or long distance access codes. A dedicated phone beside the warning computer is then used to talk to the contact. The procedure is easy and is faster than the traditional method of looking up the number and manually dialing the phone.

5. Summary

Contacting storm spotters and other local observers is a routine task at most NWS offices. Real-time event information, as well as post-event damage intelligence is invaluable in the timely issuance and subsequent verification of warnings. A Windows-based severe weather contact database has been developed for use at NWSFO Memphis, and similar programs can easily be implemented at other offices.

6. Acknowledgements

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Shelby County EMA          901-528-2780
Memphis-Shelby County Emergency
Management Agency
125 North Mid-America Mall
2B-49
Memphis, TN 38103

NWWS and NWR.

Responsible for outdoor warning sirens
and cable over-ride for Shelby County.
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Lake Poinsett State Park    501-578-2064
Located about 2 SE of Harrisburg, AR.
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Sardis Lake Field Office    601-563-4531
US Army Corps of Engineers
Sardis Lake Field Office

Located in NE Panola County, MS.

The office has wind measuring equipment
and is a good source of reports.
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Figure 1.   Examples of Severe Weather Contacts from the
Windows Cardfile Database.