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National Weather Service in Norman gauges readiness

By: Brian Painter

NORMAN, Okla. — There were no black clouds rolling in from the southwest. No lightning strikes. No hail denting car hoods.

So why were all the emergency management vehicles in the parking lot of the National Weather Center on Tuesday?

Because more than 100 emergency managers, media, National Weather Service and other National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration personnel are preparing for the days the clouds, the lightning, the hail and possibly much more bully their way into Oklahoma.

Tuesday marked the opening day of the National Weather Service's three-day "Next Generation Warning Services Workshop."

"The idea is to make our warning services for hazardous weather better," said Kevin Scharfenberg, the weather service's severe storm services coordinator.

Tom Merrill is the Emergency Manager for Cordell in Washita County. He said the weather service is receptive to making changes to fit the needs of the end-users — emergency management and the citizens they protect.

Merrill said in January the Weather Service starts going to communities to train storm spotters. In March, a severe weather workshop is held.

"That prepares everyone for the storm season," he said. "Plus, it's great to be sitting in Cordell talking on a ham radio during severe weather and know who you are talking to at the National Weather Service. You have a feel for what he's wanting."

He praised the OK

FIRST program through the Oklahoma Climatological Survey that prepares personnel for severe weather.

Lloyd Colston also is attending this week's "Next Generation Warning Services Workshop." Colston is the director of emergency management for the city of Altus in Jackson County.

"We live in an age when the sirens are not enough," Colston said.

In the last two months, Colston has set up AltusEm.Blogspot.com and [Twitter.com/AltusEm](https://twitter.com/AltusEm).