



Who are Storm Spotters?

Virtually every community has some form of spotter network. Often, local fire and police personnel are trained to observe and report severe weather, partly due to their extensive radio communication and 24-hour operations. Citizens may also be an active part of the spotter network, some with an avid interest in the weather and many without. Some spotters are amateur radio operators. All share a sense of responsibility to their neighbors.



Why become a spotter?

Real-time reports are critical in issuing warnings and saving lives. That’s an indisputable fact. Spotters provide this real-time ground-truth of local conditions - such as hail size, wind speed, storm structure, tornado development, and local damage - to help warn the public. Even as new technology allows the National Weather Service (NWS) to issue warnings with more lead time, spotters will always serve as a key link between radar indications of severe weather and what’s happening on the ground.

Do spotters “chase” storms?

Generally, no. Some may be mobile, such as law enforcement officers; and others may track storms, depending on how the local network is structured. However, most spotters simply report the weather that occurs where they are.

Do I need special tools?

Maybe – or maybe not. All spotters need a reliable and effective means of communication with their network. Some may invest in a rain gage or perhaps an anemometer for measuring wind speed.

What is Skywarn?

SKYWARN is a program sponsored by the National Weather Service. The program is made up of thousands of volunteers who attend regular training and then scan the skies of their communities identifying and reporting critical storm information. These volunteers, sometimes organized under the SKYWARN banner in the U.S., are typically trained by NWS forecasters to be the eyes and ears of both the warning forecasters and the local public safety networks.

How do I become a spotter?



Although the NWS often provides training, spotter groups in most areas are organized by emergency management officials or the police or fire department. If you are interested in becoming a spotter, check with these agencies to find out who serves as spotters in your area.

What training is required?

A typical Skywarn training class conducted by the NWS lasts about 2 hours. Classes include information on identifying storm features, effective positioning strategy, safety, and severe weather communication. The National Weather Service recommends that spotters train every 2 years to remain current.



Spotter training class, Johnson County, IA

On the web:

National Weather Service Quad Cities Spotters..... www.weather.gov/quadcities/?n=preparedness
Skywarn..... www.skywarn.org