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August 22, 2006

Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
and NOAA Administrator
Room 5128
14th Street & Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Delivered via facsimile to 202-482-6203

Dear Vice Admiral Lautenbacher:

We would like to again bring to your attention the rapidly closing window to ensure continued operation of the critical NOAA Profiler Network (NPN). The NPN produces vertical profiles of wind velocity that measurably improves weather forecasting and has saved lives by improving the timeliness and accuracy of severe storm warnings. Within roughly the next two years, however, the current NPN radars will be forced to shut down so as not to interfere with new search-and-rescue satellites operating on the same frequency. The importance of the NPN to weather forecasting has been well documented, as has the lack of effective alternatives in terms of both cost and performance. We respectfully request that NOAA move quickly to develop and implement plans to replace the NPN without a gap in service.

Despite clear findings by NOAA that the NPN should be retained (while changing frequencies), valuable time has now been lost with few signs of action. In response to a Senate Appropriations Committee request, NOAA prepared a *Cost and Operational Effectiveness Analysis for the NOAA Profiler Network* in May 2004. This COEA study reviewed several alternatives for gathering a vertical profile of wind velocity and determined that the NPN provided significantly better data than less expensive options (e.g., MDCRS, WSR-88D Doppler radar, or satellite data). Radiosondes were judged capable of obtaining comparable data but at significantly higher cost. The COEA study concluded that "the best combination of performance and cost is to maintain the NPN system and modify its frequency so as not to interfere with the reception by SARSAT satellites" (see COEA study at page 19). Nevertheless this issue has languished for the last few years, creating an unnecessary crisis.

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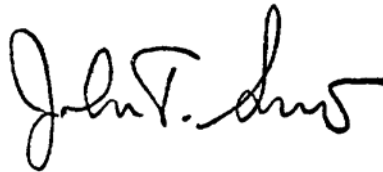
The Weather Coalition believes that changing the operating frequency of the NPN profilers from 404 MHz to 449 MHz is best achieved by replacement of the equipment rather than modification. Modification of the old “experimental” system is not straightforward and would leave NOAA with a network containing many aging components. Outright replacement will have comparable costs while fielding modern radar equipment and a highly desirable upgrade of the near-obsolete computer equipment that handles the profiler data. This will result in a modern system that will serve for decades to come.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide additional information.

Sincerely,



Ray J. Ban
Executive Vice President
The Weather Channel



John T. Snow
Director, Oklahoma Weather Center
and Dean, College of Atmospheric and
Geographic Sciences, University of
Oklahoma

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