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Wanted: storm spotters

National Weather Service needs helpers to provide data

October 22, 2003

By **Mark Weiner**
Staff writer

The National Weather Service took a step Tuesday toward easing a shortage of citizen weather observers who volunteer to spot and track storms across Central New York.

A class of about 25 meteorology students at the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry received training on how to be the eyes and ears of the weather service in the Syracuse area.

Although modern radars go a long way in tracking storms, the information supplied by storm spotters helps fill in vital information, said David Nicosia, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Binghamton.

Nicosia, who conducted Tuesday's training session, said the Binghamton weather office has 1,700 volunteer storm spotters in Upstate New York and northern Pennsylvania. But the Onondaga County portion of the network has plenty of room to grow, with only about a dozen registered spotters.

"We need more spotters in Onondaga County," Nicosia said. "Especially with all of the lake-effect snow in the Syracuse area, it helps us out a lot."

Nicosia told students in Ted Endreny's meteorology class how to spot severe weather and report it to a toll-free telephone number for storm spotters.

"You're really the eyes for the National Weather Service," Nicosia said,

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joking, "If you start seeing debris in the air, that's when we want you to call us."



In general, spotters should file reports when the wind speed exceeds 40 mph (enough to break small limbs off trees) or when rainfall adds up to 1 inch or more per hour, Nicosia said.

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The specific criteria that should generate a report include the spotting of a tornado, funnel clouds, flooding of roads or homes, wind damage to structures (such as power lines or trees) or injuries or deaths that result directly from severe weather or damage, he said.

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Meteorologists also would like the spotters to note the time and location of their observations.

Among those who volunteered are Rob Sager and Shannon Strusz, of Baldwinsville, both biology graduates from SUNY-ESF. The two came for additional training Tuesday.

"We're Weather Channel buffs," Strusz said.

Nicosia said severe weather has the potential to occur in Central New York more often than many people may believe. "On average, 30 days out of the year there are thunderstorms in or near Onondaga County," he said. "And one out of every five or six storms can be severe and strong enough to cause tree and structural damage."

For the winter, storm spotters are asked to measure snowfall at their homes.

The only requirement for someone to become a severe weather spotter is to attend a free training session and register with the National Weather Service. No other certification is required.

To volunteer, call Nicosia in Binghamton at (607) 770-9531, ext. 223. He may also be reached by e-mail at david.nicosia@noaa.gov.

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