

## NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE RETIRES ITS COASTAL WARNING DISPLAY PROGRAM

As of February 15, 1989, the National Weather Service retired its Coastal Warning Display network nationwide.

For over 100 years, display stations were established at yacht clubs, marinas, and Coast Guard stations to hoist flags, pennants and colored lights to warn mariners of storms at sea. The display stations were individually notified by the National Weather Service to raise the signals and again to lower them when the hazards passed. The National Weather Service paid for the visual signals; however, the display stations were operated by other agencies or volunteers. Although the Coastal Warning Display program has been formally discontinued, U.S. Coast Guard and other stations may continue to display warning signals without the direct participation of the National Weather Service.

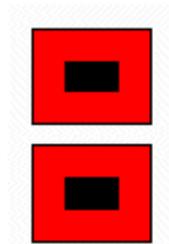
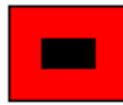
News - Beginning June 1, 2007, U.S. Coast Guard formally re-established a Coastal Warning Display program at selected small boat stations which will hoist display flags to warn of small craft advisories, gale warnings, storm warnings and hurricane warnings.

The Coastal Warning Display program was de-emphasized in favor of frequently updated [telephone recordings](#) and [NOAA Weather Radio](#). The latter covers the coastal areas of continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii, and the Mariana Islands with continuous weather broadcasts. The major shortcomings of the Coastal Warning Display program were that the displays reached only the small portion of the marine public within sight of them; it cannot convey specific information on movement, intensity, and duration; and the time required to notify the sites by individual telephone calls takes the forecaster away from critical tasks associated with the weather. Further, when users perceive them to be a full substitute for NOAA Weather Radio, other radio broadcasts, and the telephone recordings, they are actually being a disservice.

### Coastal Warning Display Signals

#### DAYTIME SIGNALS

SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY   GALE WARNING   STORM WARNING   HURRICANE WARNING



#### NIGHT (LIGHT) SIGNALS

SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY   GALE WARNING   STORM WARNING   HURRICANE WARNING



## Explanation of Warnings

**SMALL CRAFT ADVISORY:** An advisory issued by coastal and Great Lakes Weather Forecast Offices (WFO) for areas included in the Coastal Waters Forecast or Nearshore Marine Forecast (NSH) products. Thresholds governing the issuance of small craft advisories are specific to geographic areas. A Small Craft Advisory may also be issued when sea or lake ice exists that could be hazardous to small boats. There is no precise definition of a small craft. Any vessel that may be adversely affected by Small Craft Advisory criteria should be considered a small craft. Other considerations include the experience of the vessel operator, and the type, overall size, and sea worthiness of the vessel. There is no legal definition of “small craft”. The Small Craft Advisory is an advisory in Coastal Waters and Nearshore forecasts for sustained winds, frequent gusts, or sea/wave conditions, exceeding defined thresholds specific to geographic areas. A Small Craft Advisory may also be issued when sea or lake ice exists that could be hazardous to small boats.

Eastern (ME..SC, Lake Erie, Lake Ontario) - Sustained winds or frequent gusts ranging between 25 and 33 knots (except 20 to 25 knots, lower threshold area dependent, to 33 knots for harbors, bays, etc.) and/or seas or waves 5 to 7 feet and greater, area dependent.

Central (MN..OH) - Sustained winds or frequent gusts (on the Great Lakes) between 22 and 33 knots inclusive, and/or seas or waves greater than 4 feet.

Southern (GA..TX and Caribbean) - Sustained winds of 20 to 33 knots, and/or forecast seas 7 feet or greater that are expected for more than 2 hours.

Western (WA..CA) - Sustained winds of 21 to 33 knots, potentially in combination with wave heights exceeding 10 feet (or wave steepness values exceeding local thresholds).

Alaska (AK) - Sustained winds or frequent gusts of 23 to 33 knots. A small craft advisory for rough seas may be issued for sea/wave conditions deemed locally significant, based on user needs, and should be no lower than 8 feet.

Hawaii (HI), Samoa - Sustained winds 25 knots or greater and seas 10 feet or greater.

Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands - Sustained winds 22 to 33 knots and/or combined seas of 10 feet or more.

“Frequent gusts” are typically long duration conditions (greater than 2 hours).

For a list of NWS Weather Offices by Region, refer to the following website: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/organization.php>

**GALE WARNING:** To indicate winds within the range 34 to 47 knots are forecast for the area.

**STORM WARNING:** To indicate winds 48 knots and above, no matter how high the speed, are forecast for the area. However, if the winds are associated with a tropical cyclone (hurricane), the **STORM WARNING** indicates that winds within the range 48-63 knots are forecast.

**HURRICANE WARNING:** Issued only in connection with a tropical cyclone (hurricane) to indicate that winds 64 knots and above are forecast for the area.

**NOTE:** A “**HURRICANE WATCH**” is an announcement issued by the National Weather Service via press and television broadcasts whenever a tropical storm or hurricane becomes a threat to a coastal area. The “Hurricane Watch” announcement is not a warning, rather it indicates that the hurricane is near enough that everyone in the area covered by the “Watch” should listen to their radios for subsequent advisories and be ready to take precautionary action in case hurricane warnings are issued.

**NOTE:** A **SPECIAL MARINE WARNING** is issued whenever a severe local storm or strong wind of brief duration is imminent and is not covered by existing warnings or advisories. No visual displays will be used in connection with the Special Marine Warning Bulletin; boaters will be able to receive these special warnings by keeping tuned to a NOAA Weather Radio station or to Coast Guard and commercial radio stations that transmit marine weather information.



# United States Coast Guard

Semper Paratus



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*Fifth District*  
U.S. Coast Guard

U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security  
**United States  
Coast Guard**



## Press Release

Date: May 30, 2007  
Contact: (609) 677-2204

### COAST GUARD RE-ESTABLISHES STORM FLAG PROGRAM

**\*\*\*Media Availability Friday\*\*\***

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. - The U.S. Coast Guard is re-establishing a Coastal Warning Display program at selected Coast Guard small boat stations throughout the country to warn the public of approaching storm conditions.

**\*\*\*Media Note:** *A media availability is scheduled for Friday afternoon at Coast Guard Station Atlantic City. There, media can interview a Coast Guard heavy weather coxswain, or smallboat operator, and learn about the re-establishment of the storm flag program, witness the raising and lowering of the flags and discuss their meaning. Coast Guard spokespersons will be available from noon to 4 p.m. Media interested in attending must contact PA1 Kyle Niemi no later than 3 p.m. Thursday to gain access to the station facility.*

Coast Guard stations participated in the National Weather Service's official Coastal Warning Display program for more than 100 years. The re-establishment of this program, discontinued by the National Weather Service in 1989, re-enforces the Coast Guard's role as lifesavers and visually communicates that citizens should take personal responsibility for individual safety in the face of an approaching storm.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's "Population Trends Along the Coastal United States: 1980-2008," the narrow coastal fringe that makes up 17 percent of the nation's contiguous land area is home to more than half of its population. In 2003, approximately 153 million people (53 percent of the nation's population) lived in the 673 U.S. coastal counties, an increase of 33 million people since 1980.

Starting Friday, selected small boat stations will hoist display flags to warn of small craft advisories, gale warnings, storm warnings and hurricane warnings. Residents of coastal communities are urged to tune to National Weather Service radio broadcasts for the latest information when they observe a flag hoisted as part of this program.

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