

Oklahoma Climatological Survey Public Safety Outreach – OK-FIRST



The public safety outreach program of the Oklahoma Climatological Survey seeks to improve access to current weather information and provide a decision-support system for the state's public safety (fire, police, and emergency management) agencies. The program, called OK-FIRST (also known as ONALERT), has been recognized internationally for its innovative approach in providing instant access to a wealth of vital weather data for these agencies. The informational and instructional resources available through OK-FIRST are critical for the protection of life and property.

Capabilities

The OK-FIRST Program provides the following key capabilities:

- A comprehensive suite of environmental data products designed specifically for the public safety community;
- Real-time data from NEXRAD radars and surface observations from the Oklahoma Mesonet and the National Weather Service (NWS);
- Forecasts, watches, warnings, and advisories from the NWS;
- Consumer-grade visualization software developed in tandem with customer feedback;
- Intensive, hands-on education on how to access, use, and apply weather data and resources; and
- Follow-up customer support.

Applications

The information and instruction from the OK-FIRST program are useful for decision-making before, during, and after any situation impacted by the weather. Common applications of the OK-FIRST program for public-safety use include the following:

- Protection of storm spotters and the public during hazardous weather situations;
- Pre-deployment of precious resources;
- Detailed information on wind speed and direction for fire fighting and hazardous materials applications.
- Improved scheduling of public-works projects; and
- Improved responses to weather-impacted situations: hazardous materials incidents, floods, fires, ice storms, and more.

Accomplishments and Awards

- Hundreds of public safety officials across Oklahoma have received instruction, data, and products from OK-FIRST and use these resources and knowledge to make better decisions in their jurisdictions.
- Emergency managers believe that OK-FIRST has helped to save lives and reduce costs in their communities.
- OK-FIRST was one of five winners of the prestigious 2001 Innovations in American Government Award from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and the Ford Foundation.



Quotes from OK-FIRST Participants

“I promise you we’d have had deaths in Lincoln County without it. I firmly believe that.” – B. Springfield, Emergency Management Director of Lincoln County, Oklahoma; following the May 3-4, 1999 tornado outbreak.

“[Our] citizens are still in awe of your product and its ability to provide data on severe storms. These citizens extend their appreciation for your staff for their dedication to Emergency Management. OK-FIRST has undoubtedly saved countless lives and provided the citizens with peace to know that we are on the job.” – Tom Tillotson, Emergency Management Director, City of Coweta.

“I don’t know what I’d do without it. I’d probably resign. It’s that important.” – H. Gunter, Emergency Management Director of Seminole County, Oklahoma; from *The Daily Oklahoman*, May 11, 1999.

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