

APPLICATIONS OF TELEVISION TO ENHANCE  
HURRICANE AWARENESS PROGRAMS

# TV WEATHER

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## ABSTRACT

*To improve public awareness of the hurricane problem in North Carolina work has included unique applications of television. This is illustrated in the videotape program entitled "In the Path of Destruction."*

*The program was a low-cost venture and similar programming can be done in other coastal states. Guidelines on how to approach educational television and effectively develop this type of television program are provided.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Efforts to improve public understanding of the geophysical hazards of the hurricane have taken a systematic approach in North Carolina (2). One important element of this systematic approach was the production of a television program by the University of North Carolina Center for Public Television.

The television feature, called "In the Path of Destruction," was aired statewide over the Public Broadcasting System. The program helped to trigger the production of high quality 30- and 60- minute hurricane specials by 14 commercial stations in North Carolina and Virginia.

Audience response to these programs was significant. One North Carolina station rebroadcast their 30-minute special following requests from local viewers.

Additionally, the feature is now being used in educational programs sponsored by the N. C. Marine Resources Centers, N. C. Museum of Natural History, N. C. Division of Emergency Management, UNC Center for Urban and Regional Studies and the UNC Sea Grant College Program.

The program was filmed using videotape, an affordable approach that is highly compatible with the operations of commercial television stations. Similar educational programming can be done in other coastal states. Following are some guidelines that can help an MIC or OIC at coastal WSFO's and WSO's to develop an educational program on hurricanes to fit their own special needs.

### 1.a STEP ONE

Review the program schedule for your state's educational television network. Look for locally produced weekly or bi-weekly programs. For example, the hurricane program in North Carolina was done as part of a program called "Almanac," which airs each week between November 1 and May 31. Almanac is a cooperative effort between the UNC Center for Public Television and the N.C. Agricultural Extension Service. In general, Almanac offers how-to features on gardening, canning vegetables, etc., but they were very receptive to the idea of a hurricane segment.

### 1.b STEP TWO

Do some research. Find people who have had a unique hurricane experience and contact them. Evaluate these questions:

1. Is the person credible (not prone to exaggeration and without negative personality traits)?
2. Is the person willing to discuss his or her experience in front of a camera?
3. Can the person give a reasonably articulate account of their experience?
4. Are photographs or film footage available to provide visual support for the first-hand accounts?

In 1981 I learned that a young couple had been marooned on a barrier island during Hurricane Hazel. Their names were not given in any newspapers and the population in the area had changed dramatically since 1954. But with some persistence, luck and ten months of inquiry, I located the woman. Her story was one of the principal reasons for the success of the program. Her experience helped to place the geophysical hazard of the storm surge in an important human context which, I am certain, helped to facilitate viewer comprehension of the hurricane problem.

Additionally, a local television station had taken a considerable amount of low-altitude, oblique aerial photography of the coastal area most damaged by Hurricane Hazel. I met with their vice-president for public affairs and received permission to

use their film material. This storm footage greatly enhanced the educational value of the program.

Finding storm footage for your area will require some time. It is rare to find a television station that has archived historical hurricane footage. But another source exists. The University of South Carolina has established a remarkable newsfilm library and is in the process of acquiring the Movietone News Library ("The eyes and ears of the world" in the early to mid 1900's) and the Feltner Collection. The acquisition process will take time and the library may not be complete until 1986.

The films are being categorized 1) biographically, 2) geographically, 3) topically and 4) by general index, and the director of the newsfilm library is quite interested in the hurricane problem. Address your inquiries to:

James W. Jackson  
Director, Newsfilm Libraries  
Thomas Cooper Library  
University of South Carolina  
Columbia, SC 29208

#### 1.c STEP THREE

Sketch out a story line to help you focus on the information and concepts that you feel are important. Ask co-workers for their opinions.

#### 1.d STEP FOUR

Prepare a portfolio of material. Include the names, addresses and phone numbers of the people that you have identified as good sources, the film footage and photographs that you have found and articles like "In the Path of Destruction" (3) and "The Hurricane Dilemma" (4). Include any local feature articles that were well-written and accurate. Standard NOAA/NWS brochures may be included, but do not rely on these brochures to sell your ideas.

#### 1.e STEP FIVE

Borrow a copy of the videotape program "In the Path of Destruction" from Eastern Region Headquarters or Weather Service Headquarters (routing code W111).

#### 1.f STEP SIX

Set up an appointment with the producer and/or other key people at the educational television network. Tell them your ideas and thoughts about a program. Let them know that you have an example of a program done in North Carolina and some published articles that provide background information on the hurricane problem.

## 2. SUMMARY AND PROSPECT

Evidence obtained from recent research suggests that people have difficulty understanding the geophysical hazards of the hurricane because (a) they lack an adequate frame of reference for processing information about the hurricane and (b) they can only poorly construct spatial and temporal images or representations of the storm (5). For these same reasons, people experience difficulty in accurately evaluating the potential risks which they might face during a hurricane emergency.

A television program, if well-planned, well-constructed and tailored to a specific viewing area, can play an important role in encouraging awareness and understanding of the hurricane problem. Such programming can be accomplished and can be effective in promoting family and community hurricane preparedness efforts.

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## REFERENCES AND FOOTNOTES

1. John Sanders is the coastal weather awareness specialist for the University of North Carolina's Sea Grant College Program. Further information on hurricanes and the hurricane hazard may be obtained by writing to him at the UNC Sea Grant College Program, 105, 1911 Building; North Carolina State University; Raleigh, NC 27650.
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