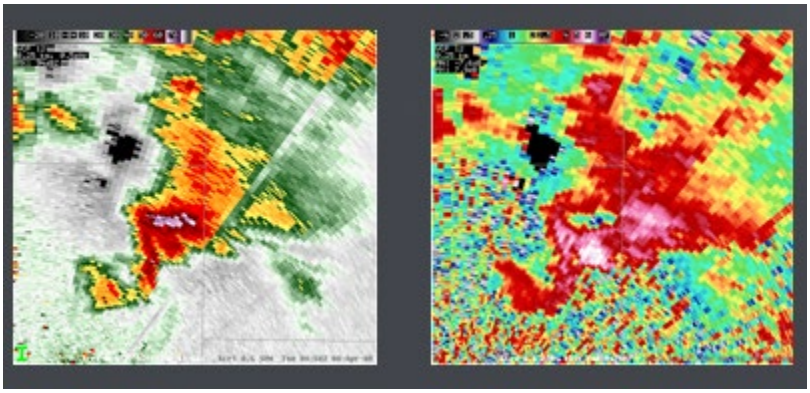
NWS Boston/Norton
SKYWARN PROGRAM

What is SKYWARN™?

The effects of hazardous weather are felt every year by many Americans. To obtain critical weather information, NOAA's National Weather Service (NWS), part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, established SKYWARN™ with partner organizations. SKYWARN™ is a volunteer program with nearly 290,000 trained severe weather spotters. These volunteers help keep their local communities safe by providing timely and accurate reports of severe weather to the NWS.

In the average year, 10,000 severe thunderstorms, 5,000 floods and more than 1,000 tornadoes occur across the United States. Southern New England is no exception with major weather events such as Superstorm Sandy, the Revere Tornado of 2014, the floods of March 2010, and numerous blizzards including the latest of February 2013. These events threatened lives and property and because of this we rely heavily on our SKYWARN™ volunteers who call the NWS in Norton, MA to report certain weather conditions. Since the program started in the 1970s, the information provided by SKYWARN™ spotters, coupled with Doppler-radar technology, improved satellite and other data, has enabled NWS to issue more timely and accurate warnings for tornadoes, severe thunderstorms and flash floods.

SKYWARN™ storm spotters are part of the ranks of citizens who form the Nation's first line of defense against hazardous weather. There can be no finer reward than to know that their efforts have given communities the precious gift of time--seconds and minutes that can help save lives. While the main role of a storm spotter is to be their community's first line of defense against dangerous storms, they also provide important information to NWS warning forecasters who make critical warning decisions. Storm spotters play a critical role because they can see things that radar and other technological tools cannot, and this ground truth is critical in helping the NWS perform our primary mission, to save lives and property.



Becoming a Spotter

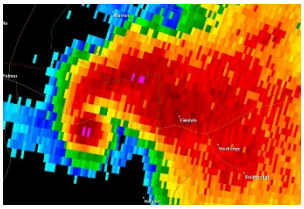
Below are few resources hosted locally at the National Weather Service in Norton, MA, as well as National and Amateur Radio resources concerning SKYWARN™.

- SKYWARN Refresher Training
- Weather Spotters Field Guide
- Prevailing Winds Newsletter
- WX1BOX Amateur Radio Information
- National SKYWARN™ Page

Forecasters from the National Weather Service (NWS) in Norton conduct storm spotter training sessions each year to help prepare spotters for the upcoming severe weather season. These sessions are free and open to anyone who is interested in learning about hazardous weather and the role of a spotter. There are some eligibility requirements to be a spotter: You must be able to observe the weather, be 16 years or older and need access to a phone to call in reports or be able to report information through the Amateur Radio Network.

Our live training sessions are 1.5-2 hours in length, and once you complete the training, you will be an official SKYWARN™ spotter. This goal of the training is to train spotters to assist local officials and the NWS with early detection of hazardous weather, and provide ground truth during severe weather events. The learning objectives of our live training sessions are:

- Understand the how the NWS Integrated Warning System works and how the spotter fits into this system
- Identify the ingredients needed for organized thunderstorms
- Recognize the visual and environmental clues suggestive of severe weather
- Distinguish between legitimate clues and non-significant features associated with severe weather
- Learn how to stay safe when storm spotting
- Learn proper storm reporting procedures



Approximately one-third of NWS-Norton's spotters also are amateur radio operators. This dual role can be helpful, especially during a major storm such as a hurricane, when phone and power lines are downed and amateur radio may become the primary means of communications.

SKYWARN™ volunteers also help the NWS by reporting winter weather, flash flooding, coastal flooding, etc., according to the established criteria. It must be stressed that we are looking for reliable and objective reports. When snowfall reports are inflated or hail sizes are exaggerated, for example, it can do more harm than good. While not a requirement, it is preferred that our SKYWARN™ volunteers would be available to receive a call from the NWS, in the event we feel that something suspicious is happening in their area.

Training sessions are held throughout southern New England, typically in the late spring and early summer months. The latest training dates can be found on the *Training Schedule* tab just above. One can also find announcements on our website or on social media.

Relationship to COMET Training

We understand that some SKYWARN™ training courses are available through COMET (the Cooperative Program for Operations Meteorology, Education, and Training) entitled "Role of the SKYWARN™ Spotter" and "SKYWARN™ Convective Basics". While these are instructive, they do not meet the requirements to become a NWS-Norton SKYWARN™ Spotter. In order to become a NWS Boston/Norton SKYWARN™ spotter, it is necessary to attend one of the in-person training classes offered, usually in the spring and early summer.

How to Report

Spotter reports help the NWS in the warning process. Your report becomes part of the warning decision making process, and is combined with radar data and other information and used by NWS forecasters to decide whether or not to:

- Issue a new warning
- Cancel an existing warning
- Continue a warning
- Issue a warning for the next county
- Change the warning type (from severe thunderstorm to tornado, for example)

For your reports to be the most useful, they should be as detailed, concise, accurate and timely as possible. Your severe weather report should address the following questions:

HOW TO REPORT:

- **WHAT** did you see?
- **WHERE** did you see it?
- **WHEN** did you see it?

Report the location/approximate location of the event. Be sure to distinguish clearly between where you are and where the event is thought to be happening (i.e., "I'm 5 miles north of Bristol. The tornado looks to be about 5 miles to my northwest"). Be sure that reports that are relayed through multiple sources carry the time of the event, **NOT** the report time.

Any other details that are important - How long did it last? Direction of travel? Was there damage? etc.