NWS Offices Unite for a Third Regional Aviation Weather Safety Workshop

The Phoenix and Albuquerque National Weather Service Forecast Offices, and the Albuquerque Center Weather Service Unit, recently partnered to organize the third cross-regional Southwest Aviation Weather Safety (SAWS) Workshop, held in Phoenix on April 22-23, 2010. The Workshop drew in attendance pilots and weather forecasters from Alaska to Washington DC. Meteorologists from over a dozen NWS Forecast Offices presented key weather information to pilots, air traffic controllers, and other organizations within the regional aviation community. The agenda included representatives from several regional NWS Headquarters offices, Aviation Weather Center, Aviation Services Branch, Warning Decision Training Branch, COMET, Arizona State University, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Southwest Airlines, and US Airways.

"The collaboration and communication among pilots and NWS meteorologists is what makes this conference special," said Jody James, Warning Coordination Meteorologist WFO Lubbock, TX. The SAWS Workshops were designed to promote aviation weather safety and productivity, as well as customer-partner interaction. The themes for SAWS III were customer decision-support services and warm season aviation weather hazards.

The first day, geared toward pilots and air traffic controllers, provided FAA WINGS Pilot Proficiency Program credit for pilots and instructors. It covered topics such as cloud recognition training, general aviation accident statistics, volcanic ash hazards, effective use of NWS TAFs and forecast discussions, in-flight convective weather avoidance, and summertime thunderstorm patterns. Attendees were given a preview of upcoming polarimetric radar products and the use of model cross-sections in weather forecasting. Overviews of the NWS Aviation Weather Center decision support services and Air Route Traffic Control Center Weather Service Unit products and services were also presented. An informal social dinner was held later in the evening at a local restaurant, where approximately 30 workshop participants met in a casual environment to continue discussions from earlier in the day and develop important relationships with other pilots and meteorologists.

The second day, designed primarily for meteorologists, addressed TAF improvements through utilizing the GFS Localized Aviation MOS Program, an analysis of aviation forecast verification statistics, TAF
categorical amendment criteria, an overview of COMET’s Distance Learning Aviation Course, and climatology of summer dust storms in Phoenix, AZ. Southwest Airlines and US Airways provided invaluable briefings, helping to improve NWS aviation decision support services and customer relations. The second day closed with an open discussion of hot topics within the NWS aviation program, lead by Scott Birch (NWS Western Region Aviation Meteorologist), Jeff Osiensky (Alaska Regional Deputy Chief Environmental and Services Division), Victor Murphy (Southern Region Climate Services Program Manager), and Cammye Sims (NWS HQ Aviation Services Branch Meteorologist).

SAWS III drew 90 meteorologists, aviators, controllers, instructors, and airline representatives on day one and over 60 participants on day two. Overall, the response to the workshop was very positive. "The SAWS Workshop is like a well oiled machine, very well done, “stated Lance Tripoli, Meteorologist and Aviation Program Leader with WFO El Paso, TX. Attendees were given the opportunity to complete workshop surveys, where they responded favorably to the interactive nature of the workshop, presentation content and style, and overall organization of the event. On a scale of 1 to 10, positive ratings for SAWS III averaged 9. According to the surveys, as well as verbal feedback, the workshop was a tremendous success with attendees already looking forward to SAWS IV, planned for October 2011 in Albuquerque, NM.

For more information about the Southwest Aviation Weather Safety Workshop, contact David Craft at David.Craft@noaa.gov or (505) 243-0702 ext 0.