

A&M unit gives tornado alerts

By FRANK K. VASOVSKI
On May 11, 1970, the National Weather Service (NWS) in Kansas City, Mo., alerted its Lubbock office to the "unusual instability of atmospheric conditions over the West Texas plains."
This condition deteriorated during the afternoon hours, the usual period for tornado formation. At 9:35 p.m., a tornado struck Lubbock, killing 27 persons, injuring 1,500, destroying 1,040 homes and damaging 8,876. The low number of casualties in Lubbock, a city of 150,000, was credited to the early warning which allowed the population to seek the safety of a shelter.
During the period of 1953-1973, Texas led the nation in the incidence of tornadoes with 2,364 confirmed cases. Oklahoma was second with 1,219 cases. Texas also led the nation in number of deaths from tornadoes during the same period with 301 casualties, barely edging Alabama with 293 deaths. These figures were provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).
The high incidence of tornadoes in Texas and adjoining states is attributed to the notorious "Tornado Alley" stretching along a line running northeast from Hobbs, N.M. to Kansas City, Mo. and points beyond.
Because of the high unpredictability of tornadoes all states in or near their path use available resources to track their course and to reduce the loss in human lives and property, especially during the high incidence months of April, May and June.
Texas A&M University's radar weather station located on the 12th floor of the Oceanography and Meteorology Building provides severe weather advisories and warning service to the entire Brazos County.

Severe weather warnings are furnished to the station directly by the inter-county NOAA office in Waco, responsible for dissemination of such warnings to Brazos, Leon, Madison and Robertson counties.
On the basis of Brenton's analysis of March 22, 1978, weather reports, the station began monitoring the movement of a squall line approaching the central part of Texas from the northwest along the line extending from Abilene, Texas to Ardmore, Okla.
At 1 a.m. March 23, Brenton's staff agreed that all conditions of the squall line indicated a strong possibility of a severe storm threatening Brazos County even though a warning was not issued by the Stephenville or Fort Worth NWS radar stations.
All radar stations located along the estimated path of the approaching squall line, including Fort Worth, Stephenville, Hondo, Austin and Waco NWS stations kept close watch on the storm, reporting its movement and changes in its behavior. Because of the overlap in their radar reach, information on the squall line is passed from one station to another like a football.
The radar weather station on the university began operating March 23, 1978. Although the range of its 10-cm radar is designed to detect a target as far as 300 miles away, the curvature of the earth and distortion factors reduce the range of the set to approximately 150 miles. The station also has a 3-cm radar set for detailed analysis of cloud formations.

Upon entering an operating radar facility, one experiences a sensation like that of a visitor to a movie theater when all lights are extinguished and the first frames of the feature are about to appear on the screen. At first, he is unable to notice other persons around him and to comprehend what is going on. It's like being involved in a strange ritual because of the subdued lights and hushed conversation. Strange terminology used by the operating personnel to translate radar screen images into numerically coded messages adds to the sense of being far out of an ordinary place.
A steady stream of messages can be observed being exchanged between the radar station and the adjacent control room of the weather station. Verbal and written reports are discussed and plotted on the situation chart or "the box" as it is called by the operating personnel. The box represents an approximate area affected by the storm under surveillance. It is frequently updated to show any change in the movement and configuration of the storm.
In the case of the squall line on March 23, the box had a form of a huge quadrangle with San Antonio, Junction, Fort Worth and Lufkin representing its four corners.
At approximately 5:05 p.m. that day, the NWS radar station in Fort Worth began to disseminate severe weather watch instructions through the Texas State Network and cooperating commercial radio and TV stations. Similar messages began

to appear on TV screens of Brazos County residents.
At about 9 p.m. it became obvious that the weather system no longer posed any threat to Brazos County. Upon reaching the area of Bryan, the system split into two distinct fragments, one of them skirting the city to the north and the other sliding to the south. Both fragments showed signs of a progressive dissipation.
Considerably more exciting was the experience of the members of two special Server Storm Intercept Project (SSIP) teams, which were dispatched to the area of the disturbance.
Project SSIP is composed of 30 undergraduate students supervised by two graduate students, John Marrs and Judd Ladd, assisted by Greg Bostwick, a meteorology senior. The project mission is to conduct field and laboratory research and investigation of all factors related to the severe weather phenomena through collection of samples, observation and reporting of the behavior of storm systems directly from the area affected by the disturbance.
Two cars, manned by the SSIP personnel, left the university about 12:30 p.m. on March 23, for the area of Stephenville, Texas. After a preliminary contact with Waco and Fort Worth NWS stations, both teams had collected samples of hail in the vicinity of Meridian, Hico and Stephenville. They reported the movement of the storm system to the neighboring NWS stations,

police and motorists, requesting assistance in dissemination of the updated information on the storm to the residents in the area.
Late in the evening hours the storm began moving toward Fort Worth and Dallas. At 8:25 p.m. SSIP learned that a tornado funnel touched down in Plano, north of Dallas, destroying one mobile home and damaging five others. No casualties were reported. Both teams returned home late that night.
A person even vaguely familiar with the destructive force of a tornado or storm may be surprised by the absence of panic or confusion at the station during its operation.
Jack Canglose, who is responsible for alerting the county population in case of real emergency explains why.
"Approximately 2,000 storms of various size are in progress at any moment worldwide," he said. "Unless a clear danger exists which could result in loss of life or serious damage to property, Canglose is reluctant to activate warning sirens. He is certain the public will be adequately informed what to do in case of real emergency.
Canglose urges that the public stay tuned to local radio and TV stations during actual emergencies and follow the instructions while he and his colleagues follow the storm."

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"We have one of the finest, if not the finest facility of this type in the country," said Dr. Vance E. Moyer, meteorology professor and Brazos County Civil Defense warning officer.
Moyer made his observation in the late afternoon of March 23, 1978, during an emergency operation conducted by the station in conjunction with an unstable weather system reported in the general direction of "Tornado Alley." Prior analysis of that system revealed a potential severe weather threat to Brazos County.
Charles L. Brenton Jr., meteorological engineer of the station, explained that his facility receives two worldwide weather summaries each day and hourly national weather forecasts through the NWS terminals at the station. Brenton and his staff evaluate these reports and prepare 24-hour routine forecasts for Brazos County.
"Even 72-hour forecasts are made for us with a fair degree of confidence on the basis of national and inter-county NWS forecasts," Brenton said.

DID YOU KNOW ... That Fri. April 14, is Clothes Day.
Sponsored by the TAMU Anti-Gay Task Force (TAMUAGTF), Clothes Day is a campus effort to show our opposition of Gays on Campus. TAMUAGTF members along with their supporters are urging everyone to join them in wearing clothes. Friday April 14 to show our opposition. So C'Mon — get your clothes out of the closet & join us Friday.

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