

The COPUS Clarion

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The Coalition on the Public Understanding of Science (COPUS) is a grassroots effort linking universities, scientific societies, science centers and museums, advocacy groups, media, educators, government agencies, businesses, and industry in a peer network having as its goal a greater public understanding of the nature of science and its value to society.

GET TO KNOW YOUR STATION SCIENTIST

- Sara Espinoza, Program Director, Weather & Environment and
- Ann Posegate, Outreach Coordinator, Weather & Environment
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Have you hugged your local broadcast meteorologist today? You might consider it. All across the country, even as you read this, they are communicating important scientific and environmental information to millions of Americans.

Increasingly, broadcast meteorologists in the U.S. are taking on the role of “station scientist,” covering a range of important weather, environment and climate topics for their viewers. To help, the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) has teamed up with the American Meteorological Society and the Cooperative Program for Operational Meteorology Education and Training (COMET®). Together, these organizations provide free, accurate and up-to-date resources that complement the local forecast.



The Need

Americans are fascinated with the weather. American adults get more than 300 billion weather reports each year. The average adult checks the weather forecast three times per day. More likely than not, they're getting it from their television.

Even in a wired era when many have Internet access in their pockets, the most common source for the weather forecast remains television, making local broadcast meteorologists prominent community figures. As a matter of fact, the weather report is the number-one reason people watch the news!

But meteorologists are giving their viewers much more than a weather forecast.

Broadcast meteorologists are important scientific communicators in our society. Together with the National Weather Service, they consistently offer relevant, organized scientific information to help the public make decisions about their daily lives. They use graphics and simple language to explain complex natural systems and causal relationships; the repetitive nature of the

weather cast makes it easier for the public to understand and retain basic scientific concepts. These skills – coupled with strong connections between weather, climate and the environment – are helping to position broadcast meteorologists as the go-to people for science and environmental information in the newsroom.

A recent study shows that 66 percent of Americans trust broadcast meteorologists to provide the scoop – not just on today's weather, but on climate and environmental topics, too. Broadcast meteorologists are covering topics ranging from water and air quality to shifting wildlife migrations and year-to-year changes in Arctic sea ice volume. And

this new role couldn't come at a better time – Americans are hungry for information about climate and environment and research shows that there is still a lot to learn.

A survey by the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University found that a majority of Americans are worried about climate change. However, many think that climate change will affect other plant and animal species (62 percent) or future generations (62 percent), as opposed to themselves (32 percent) or their families (35 percent).

When asked if they needed more information about climate change, 60 percent said they needed “a lot” or “some” more information to form an opinion about climate change. Additionally, 10 years of survey research by NEEF and Roper Research

shows that just 12 percent of Americans can pass a basic quiz on energy topics and less than half of the population knows that the cars and appliances they use contribute to global climate change. Only 23 percent of Americans know that stormwater runoff pollution is the number-one cause of water pollution in the United States.

Simple individual actions – turning off lights to save energy, recycling household hazardous wastes or conserving water during a drought – are vital to

addressing today's environmental problems, but will only be successful if people are provided clear, relevant information as it relates to daily life.



Photo taken by DavidT2006, Creative Commons

Earth Gauge: Beyond the Forecast

NEEF recognizes the need for increased environmental awareness among the public as a means to inspire action. Through the Earth Gauge® program, we are taking a unique approach to educating the public by linking environmental information to something that affects every individual: the local weather report.

Resources Provided to Meteorologists Include:

- A weekly e-newsletter that provides environmental and climate information tied to the local three-day forecast;
- A series of online courses on weather-environment topics developed in partnership with the COMET program including the recently released “Climate Change: Fitting the Pieces Together”;
- Short video clips on climate and environment topics that can be included on-air or online;
- Earth Gauge Kids, a web site designed to bring monthly weather-environment themes and fun activities to grades 5-8.

Earth Gauge information is currently distributed to 200 television meteorologists in 109 U.S. cities with more than 241 million local television viewers. Not only do meteorologists appreciate ready-made information to include in their on-air and online weather materials, but they also recognize the importance of providing this information to their viewers.

“Viewer response [to Earth Gauge] has been great. They love hearing more information than just about the weather, especially when we are having a quiet weather day. It is important because environmental issues are on everyone’s mind, and it is great to be able to help them sort through the information.”

– Joe Winters, Chief Meteorologist, KCRG-TV, Cedar Rapids, IA

“For a lot of people the only exposure they get to environmental science is from nightly weather reports. TV meteorologists can play a vital role in raising the awareness on these important issues. Earth Gauge is a fantastic service because not only do they come up with vital environmental issues, but they offer suggestions on what viewers can do to take the appropriate action.” – Joe R. Diaz, Chief Meteorologist, KOAT-TV, Albuquerque, NM

By connecting broadcast meteorologists with information about their local environment and climate, NEEF envisions a country where the public will better understand basic scientific concepts and address environmental and climate impacts in their communities with simple, every-day actions.

Get to Know Your Station Scientist

You can reach out to your local broadcast meteorologist and get him or her involved in community events and activities.

- Invite a local broadcast meteorologist to make a presentation about weather or climate at your school, club or workplace.
- Ask a broadcast meteorologist to be a speaker, emcee or participant at an event.
- Arrange a meeting with a local meteorologist to brainstorm ways you might collaborate – perhaps your organization has interesting information about the local environment to share or an interesting backdrop for a future forecast.
- Invite a broadcast meteorologist to serve on an advisory committee for your organization.

Resources You Can Use

- Earth Gauge message archives: www.earthgauge.net
- Free online courses—although designed initially for broadcast meteorologists, these are good primers for anyone interested in weather-environment topics: www.earthgauge.net/courses
- Earth Gauge Kids—for kids in grades 5-8: www.earthgauge.net/kids
- Earth Gauge Video Clips: www.earthgauge.net/public-video

For additional information about the station scientist initiative and the Earth Gauge program, please feel free to contact Ann Posegate at aposegate@neefusa.org. Ann is the Outreach Coordinator, Weather & Environment, at the National Environmental Education Foundation.



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HIGHLIGHTS CELEBRATING

AUGUST'S THEME OF

CLIMATE AND WEATHER!

YEAR
of SCIENCE 2009
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Questions? Comments? Ideas? Contact admin@copusproject.org.

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