

Report of Recent Club Speakers



MSgt Michael Sanborn from the Air Force Weather Agency (AFWA) at USSTRATCOM was the speaker this week. AFWA produces weather forecasts for pinpoint areas, such as airports around the globe, each point including an area of only about five miles radius. This contrasts with the National Weather Service (NWS) which forecasts for a broad area. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is part of the NWS and mainly predicts severe weather, especially for sea and space. AFWA also doesn't give percentage possibilities for rain. For a specific point, like an airport, they say it either will rain or will not.

AFWA produces about 800,000 products each day. They include forecasts for 79 airfields in the United States, with three forecasts for each location each day and forecasting for each hour of the day. AFWA has three main weather hubs in the United States.

Weather forecasting is a broad career field. AFWA and NOAA forecasters go to school for nine months in Mississippi. Their work can include aviation weather, space weather forecasting, specialized weather for the intelligence community, and climatology. They also do volcano monitoring, especially for ash fallout, and humanitarian missions to forecast for aircraft takeoffs and landings. Weather is especially important for helicopter missions.

Space weather forecasting is a developing field and AFWA is the sole source of information there. It includes studies of solar flares and electromagnetic energy from the sun. We are entering the Solar maximum, part of a nine year cycle where sun activity is the highest and can affect GPS, cell phones, TV, and other signals.

MSgt Sanborn has been to Iraq three times, maintaining a weather station there. He hopes to go to Afghanistan on his next deployment. More information about AFWA is available at www.afweather.af.mil.