

The Catch

COCORAHS—QUICK REMINDER ABOUT HEAVY RAINS

FORT COLLINS, CO — Wednesday, August 6, 2008

Greetings to all CoCoRaHS participants:

This is just a quick message to remind you of the special importance of reporting heavy rains. The "Flash Flood Watch" issued today for our area of Colorado reminded me to write now, and not later. (Remember, you can use <http://www.weather.gov> to view severe weather watches and warnings for any and all parts of the country.)

The bread and butter of CoCoRaHS are our once-a-day 24-hour precipitation reports that most of us send in each morning. That is what we use to map the precipitation patterns across the country each day. If you have not yet looked at the CoCoRaHS national precipitation maps, I highly recommend it. Just go to the homepage <http://www.cocorahs.org>. Then scroll down the page below the map of CoCoRaHS participating states and you can see what happens when a few thousand people share their backyard rainfall measurements each day. Good work!

There is a second report format called the "Intense Precipitation" report. If you have clicked on "My Data", look on the upper left hand part of your screen and you will see a menu of report options. "Intense Precipitation" is third on the list

<http://www.cocorahs.org/Admin/MyDataEntry/IntensePrecipReport.aspx>

This report form lets you report incremental rainfall amounts at any time of the day and as often as you deem necessary. We receive these data and they are immediately posted on the CoCoRaHS website. But the MOST IMPORTANT REASON for using the "Intense Precipitation" report is to notify the National Weather Service and emergency managers. Your message is immediately delivered to your local NWS office. Eleven years after our Fort Collins flash flood, it still weighs on me heavily that no one, including myself, did weather forecasters the favor of letting them know how hard it was raining here that night. Lives were lost that night. We all assumed that technology (radar, satellite, automated weather stations, etc.) was doing the job and our little backyard gauges were of limited value. In reality, the way forecasters and emergency managers confidently interpret their technological aids is with the help of the type of measurements that you and I can provide. Our measurements matter!

We don't use a strict definition of "Intense Precipitation", but if it is raining hard or has been raining for a while then please make use of the "Intense Precipitation" report. I use the long-standing definition of heavy rain as 0.30" or greater in an hour -- but you can use what makes sense in your area. You can also use this report to send in hourly (60 minute) rainfall amounts. NWS makes good use of these hourly reports for validating radar estimates of precipitation.

If there are large storms in your area but you are NOT getting much rain, this is also a good reason to use the "Intense Precipitation" reports. Then forecasters have a better idea of the areas affected by the storm.

In the case of these special reports, it is better to be safe than sorry. If you think officials might benefit from your information, then please send in a report. Since June 1, 2008 we have received 1,700 "Intense Precipitation" reports this summer. Some of these have already aided the National Weather Service in issuing timely and specific forecasts and warnings. These efforts are greatly appreciated. But we have also noticed many big storms where no CoCoRaHS reports of heavy rain were sent in. Keep in mind that an approximate reading may be better than nothing, so if you have a gauge that you can see from inside your house, use it to estimate the recent rainfall. Make appropriate "Notes" on your report. The more precise CoCoRaHS measurement can then be sent in later. Just don't let a big storm strike your area without letting officials know.

If you have questions about how to use the "Intense Precipitation" report, please contact your local or regional CoCoRaHS coordinator. Thanks very much for your help.

Before I let you go, we had company this week -- and it included a young yellow Labrador. I will elaborate later, if I can.

Thanks for being a part of CoCoRaHS -- and if you have not yet started measuring and reporting your rainfall -- this would be a good time :-)

Sincerely,

Nolan Doesken
Colorado State University