



Warning Britain: The National Severe Weather Warning Service in action during three recent strong wind events

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The National Severe Weather Warning Service (NSWWS) was created 26 years ago in response to the Great Storm of 1987. Initially, it was based on certain thresholds being exceeded, much like the pre-1987 warning system, but with a greatly increased scope, both in terms of areal influence and warning lead time. Following a major overhaul in 2011, the NSWWS is currently much more impact-based and takes account not only of the expected weather but also of the effect this is likely to have on national and local infrastructure. The NSWWS is now also augmented by specialist knowledge gained from current working relationships with partner agencies of the Met Office.

In parallel with these developments, communication channels have undergone something of a revolution in recent years. The increased use of the internet and the more recent advent of social media, amongst other things, have vastly expanded the variety of ways in which warnings of severe weather can be communicated to the public and emergency responders.

A brief history of the NSWWS is given from its inception following the Great Storm of 1987 through to the present day. The working of the current system is illustrated by a comparison of three dissimilar strong wind events that occurred during the winter of 2011/2012. The forecasts in the days leading up to each of these events varied greatly in terms of confidence levels. This led to very different approaches regarding the issue of warnings and the communication of the relevant messages to the public and other customers, effectively demonstrating the flexibility of the current systems.