The heat warning smartphone app of the DWD

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The use of smartphones and tablet computers has increased substantially during the last years. This trend is expected to continue. Accordingly, it becomes more and more important for a national meteorological service to provide information adapted to mobile devices especially for users that do not permanently have access to computers.

Until recently, in Germany heat warnings were distributed merely via internet, e-mail and, to some selected user groups, also via fax. A major target group of heat warnings are public health institutions such as elderly care homes but also mobile nursing services. Especially the latter was hard to reach via fax, internet or e-mail, because this group often has no access to a computer while on duty. To improve the pervasiveness of heat warnings we developed a smartphones application. In a first step the app was developed for android (version 2.2 and higher).

In order to concentrate on the relevant information (e.g. is there a heat warning for my region of interest, yes or no) and to obtain an app with a small storage size and low data transfer volume, we kept the application as simple as possible. The user can pre-select up to 10 counties (Germany is subdivided in about 300 counties) either by choosing the counties directly from a list or via the actual geographic location. If a heat warning is issued for one (or more) of the selected counties, the user is informed with a notification in the status bar and through an acoustical signal. The user can send the warning via SMS to others who have non-android devices. For a map with the distribution of heat warnings over Germany the user is linked to the DWD web-site. The app is available free of charge and it is not necessary to register.

We plan to extend the heat warning app with further biometeorological warnings (e.g. UV warnings). For biometeorological forecasts other than warnings we plan to develop mobile web-sites or web-apps, which have the advantage of being platform independent.