

August 29, 2005

WAS*IS Workshop Interest Statement
National Center for Atmospheric Research
Boulder, CO

I am extremely excited about the chance to attend the upcoming WAS*IS workshop at the National Center for Atmospheric Research. Because of my particular interest in the societal impacts of climate change and natural disasters, I believe I would make a good candidate to attend the workshop, and therefore be able to contribute to the advancement of this growing and urgently needed aspect of meteorological and social science research.

Since enrolling in the new Climate and Society masters program at Columbia University earlier this year, I have been fascinated with the number and scale of impacts that potentially exist as a result of global climate change. Increased risk of drought, floods, and heat waves will continue to threaten already vulnerable populations in this country and abroad. Given the well-coordinated application of meteorological research, many of these impacts on our society may be mitigated or even averted. It should be our duty to apply our scientific knowledge and assist these populations in their times of struggle.

The recent path of Hurricane Katrina is an excellent example of how a team of well-prepared and advised decision makers can protect the populations in their care in times of crisis. Confidence in the forecast track and coordination with meteorologists helped President Bush declare federal disaster areas in Louisiana and Mississippi 12 hours before landfall, and helped the mayor of New Orleans issue an unprecedented evacuation order for New Orleans in enough time for residents to flee to safety. Media coverage continually stressed that the storm's effects would not be limited to the "thin black line" along the forecasted path and instead focused on its large size, also bringing attention to the potentially deadly risk of inland flooding. Use of rapidly updating hurricane impacts models from Louisiana State University provided revised flooding and storm surge forecasts for New Orleans at nearly street-level resolution several times throughout the landfall process. Tools like these become invaluable to emergency managers and media and help save lives when disasters strike.

These are the things I am interested in. Saving lives and ensuring the public's safety in times of weather- or climate-related disasters are worthy areas of study in meteorological academia. Physical and social scientists should continue to explore new ways of incorporating research into useful products for public use in an era of global climate change. I believe the WAS*IS workshop will provide a unique opportunity (especially for young scientists like myself) for addressing these issues.

Best regards,

Eric Holthaus
Enclosure: CV