



Dave Hansen | Staff photographer

A March 13 snowstorm caused near-whiteout conditions in parts of Rhode Island but accurately measuring just how much snow fell in a storm like this can be tricky.

A GAME OF INCHES

A lack of 'weather spotters' in Newport has made measuring snow totals difficult for the National Weather Service

By Laura Damon
Staff writer

NEWPORT — When the National Weather Service listed 2 inches as the snowfall total for Newport on March 13, a Daily News editor took a ruler and stepped outside to challenge that seemingly inaccurate number.

He measured an average of 8 inches of snow; a National Weather Service spokesman told a reporter the 2-inch listing was due to a lack of “weather spotters” in Newport.

Weather spotters provide reports of severe and hazardous weather to meteorologists. They keep an eye out for storm clouds, and some take snowfall measurements and report those numbers.

Weather spotters need only be interested in meteorology and must be at least 16 years old. No fancy equipment is needed; “All you need are your eyes,” said Glenn Field, a warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service based in Norton, Massachusetts.

“We need a lot of spotters,” Field said.

There are currently 8,000 spotters in southern New England, which includes most of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and northern Connecticut, Field said. “That sounds like a lot, but some of them may have moved on and we don’t know about it, or they’re not actively reporting.” In fact, only about 10 percent of that number report to the National Weather Service in a given storm, Field said.

In the city of Newport, 27 spotters are

listed in the National Weather Service database, but some are considered inactive, Field said.

The National Weather Service established SKYWARN, a nationwide volunteer organization to train people across the country on how to identify cloud features associated with severe thunderstorms and tornadoes, the proper way to measure snowfall and other techniques.

Only one training session is needed to become a certified weather spotter. The certification lasts five years, then needs to be renewed.

One session is slated for Saturday, May 12, from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Middletown Fire Department, 239 Wyatt Road.

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