

Inches

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For more information, visit weather.gov/skywarn. At the end of the session, weather spotters are issued ID numbers and cards with an 800 number to call and make reports.

"We rely heavily on trained spotters in real time," Field said.

Doppler weather radar is excellent at tracking storms, "but at long ranges," Field said. The radar is situated at a certain elevation above the ground. "It doesn't tell us what's at the ground," he said. Spotters help fill in the gaps and coupled with the radar, a "human-machine mix of information"

is achieved.

In conjunction with the radar readings, warnings that have already been issued can be verified or a spotter could notice something the radar missed that would necessitate a new warning.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency provides assistance to municipalities based on record or near-record snowfall, according to official reports on snow accumulations. Acceptable reports include snowfall amounts measured and published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Climatic Data Center or measurements made by observers from the National Weather Service.

"They do count the spotter reports as being valid as long as the National Weather Service has vetted them," Field said. Though sometimes a snowplow operator may increase the number or spotters may exaggerate, "we're really on to many of those schemes," and the vetting process is rigorous, Field said.

The National Weather Service obtains a snowfall measurement from T.F. Green Airport, and reports are gathered from other sources like the Department of Transportation, but civilian weather spotters play a role as well. "Their reports are important," Field said.

Damon@NewportRI.com