

SWIFT WX Professional Weather Tracking Software

“This will be no Katrina,” read a simple statement on the *Wichita Eagle* website following a devastating EF5 (from the Enhanced Fujita scale, a measurement of storm strength) tornado in Greensburg, Kansas. The storm erased the town with its 200-mph winds and a 1.5-mile-wide path that racked over 22 miles. The statement was made by U.S. Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS) as he spoke to a group of residents staying at a local shelter. Luckily, early warnings reduced the loss of life.

Your Own Early Warnings

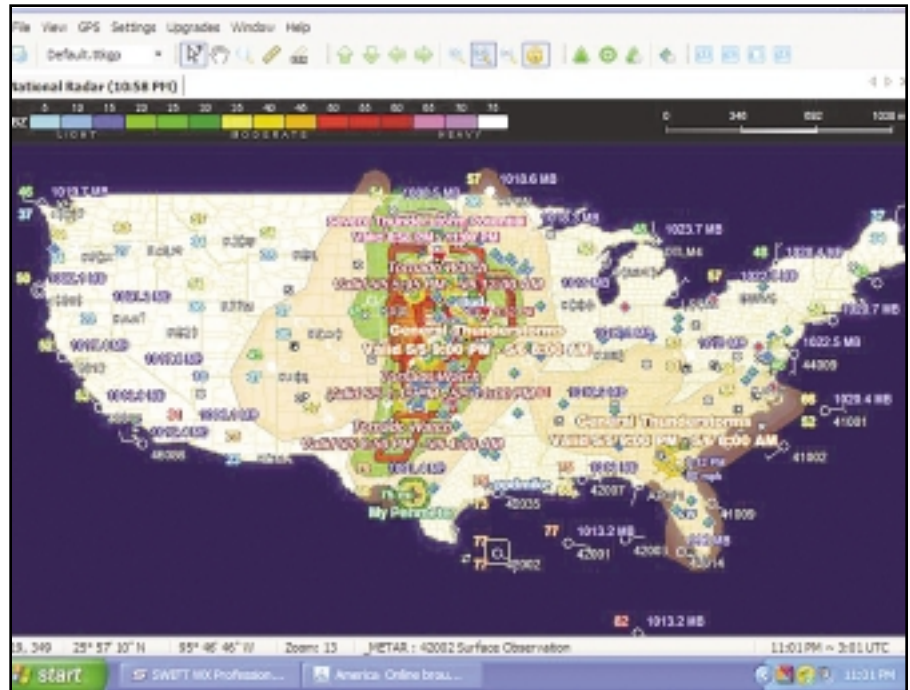
Now you have the ability to monitor local weather radar, spotter reports, National Weather Service (NWS) watches, and warnings as they happen for any point in the United States.

SWIFT WX Professional is an automated Internet downloading and GPS integration tool written for storm chasers, storm spotters, and emergency management personnel.

If you have an Internet connection, you can use SWIFT WX. The new software for consumers allows them to stay ahead of deadly weather and keep their families protected with advanced warnings—even before the weatherman makes public announcements.

SWIFT WX, which was designed for consumers by tornado chasers, features more than 1,100 weather maps, weather radar down to the street level, GPS tracking, perimeter alerts/first alerts, and up-to-the-minute data feeds from 140 weather service offices. The software allows you to track your position over any weather map by plotting your current position over radar, satellite, or surface maps using GPS technology. If you’re a storm chaser you’ll know where the storm is and how to intercept it.

With SWIFT WX’s storm-tracking technology, you’ll be able to see the path of severe storms, including thunderstorms and tornadoes, on any weather map, indicating bearing, intensity, and



SWIFT WX’s national radar overlay gives users the ability to see severe weather across the United States. (Screen capture by the author)

velocity. You can also drill down into storm data, viewing reporting stations, cell ID, direction, speed, and other important variables.

According to the developers SWIFT WX is geared for storm chasers in pursuit of severe weather, spotters observing and reporting, and emergency managers acting with safety in mind. Using predefined catalogs, users can download only the pertinent weather data without browsing through pages of irrelevant information. Users can also animate a time series of maps to view a storm’s progression.

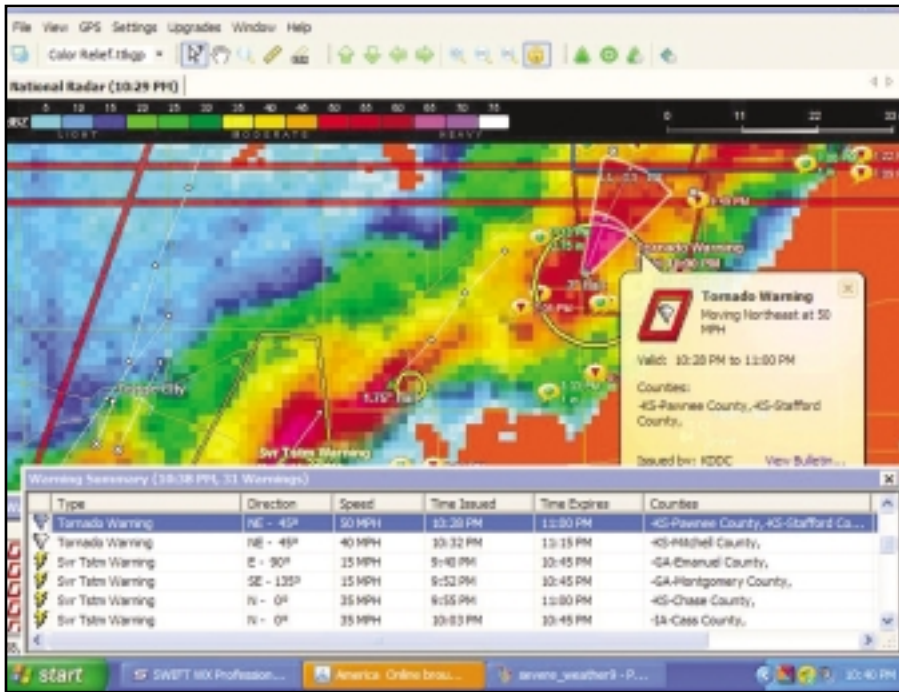
A Deeper Understanding

Everyone talks about the weather, but few people understand it. Have you ever wondered why thunderstorms form? Now you can be the person others come to with a question on the weather. Whether or not you’re a seasoned meteorologist or simply someone interested

in studying weather, you should know that the SWIFT WX support staff participates in a users’ forum where questions can be asked and suggestions offered for new features.

For instance, one feature being developed by a user is an overlay map showing various radio frequencies in use in a given area. These can include NOAA weather radio frequencies as well as amateur radio repeaters and SKYWARN frequencies. In fact, the software user community regularly contributes its own modifications to the program. One user created a light pollution background map, as well as a tornado map, showing activity from 1985 to 2004.

Other features include live storm reports from local law enforcement agents and trained storm spotters, custom geographical overlays, and integrated “position tracking,” including custom icons and user webcams. If another user has registered his or her email address,

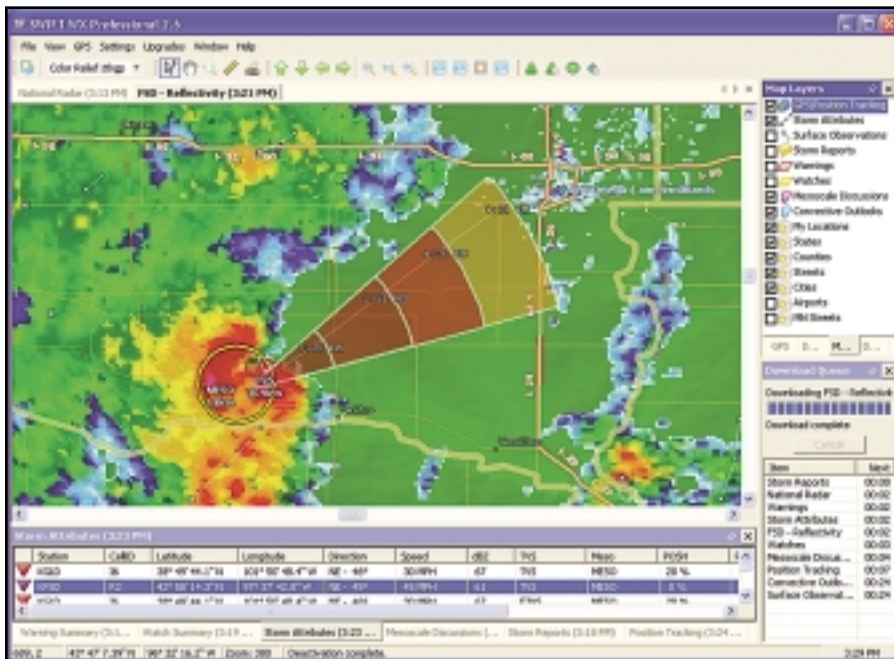


Users are able to focus on local severe weather, link to active watches and warnings, and get local spotter reports. (Screen capture by the author)

you can actually contact that user via email. Besides the mapping overlays, you can also have tables appear with different watches and warnings. When information does appear, you can click on a link to see the actual data from the NWS.

For those interested in learning more about the weather, you should know that you can receive emails with weather tuto-

rials. For instance, in late April an email was sent asking whether or not users knew why some thunderstorms intensify and produce tornadoes while others do not? According to SWIFT WX's CEO Rory Groves there are some basic trends forecasters look at to predict tornadic storms. For instance, during a severe weather event, the email explained, forecasters



The StormPath feature detects hail and tornadoes and predicts times of arrival. (Photo from swiftwx.com)

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use a special kind of radar image, called Base Velocity, to look for rotation inside thunderstorms. The email went on to provide a link to a three-minute radar tutorial explaining how it works and how SWIFT WX provides you with the same capability.

Another tutorial shows you how to customize the weather display to your preference and how to create a storm alert perimeter to warn you in advance of severe weather. You can also create loca-

tions on the map which could show a relative's home, a summer home, or a favorite vacation spot. You could create locations for cities that you travel to on business, or the location of a child away at school.

Feedback Welcome

The software developers are really interested in user comments. It's rare to have a software developer actually mon-

itoring his work email so that he can respond to a user's question in a short period of time. One user wrote,

Rory, I really want to compliment you on how well you've worked with the users and how open you are to changes! It just goes to show how good programs can be when the developer cares what the users think/want and when they are willing to provide input. However, rarely have I ever seen a programmer go to the lengths that you do to try to accommodate most/all changes requested. You've had me on the edge of my seat waiting for each upgrade to see what else you've included.

For weather tracking, SWIFT WX includes a layer of interstates and major highways, but you may add more detailed, county-level streets by importing GIS mapping files. One source of these files is from the U.S. Census Bureau. The program does not integrate with other mapping software.

Single Source

For the two weeks I had the opportunity to use SWIFT WX, the weather in Texas, Kansas, and other states brought with it death and massive destruction. Having the mapping tools at my desk enabled me to see the path of the severe storms, reports of tornados on the ground, reports of hail, flash flooding, and other information before it was on the local TV news. It gave me one source on the Web to find the information I was interested in without having to search various weather service websites.

Nitty-Gritty—And Why You Need To Buy One

SWIFT WX is available for a two-week trial period and then can be purchased for \$14.50/month or \$156/year. Once you subscribe, your price is locked in for as long as you subscribe. You can use the software on multiple computers, making it convenient to monitor the weather on your desktop or laptop while traveling.

Your computer must run Windows 98/2000/XP/Vista, have a CPU of 1.2 GHz or better plus 512 MB RAM or more memory. You'll need 50 MB of hard drive space available and an Internet connection of 56.7 Kbps or better. It will work with a DSL, cable, cell phone, or other Internet connection. For further information, contact www.swiftwx.com. ■

Pop'Comm August 2007 Survey Questions

This month we'd like to ask you about your public service involvement or interest (please circle all the appropriate numbers).

How important is public service to your radio hobby?

- Extremely important, it's the reason I'm involved 1
- Moderately important, I volunteer when I can 2
- Not important, I don't engage in volunteer services 3

I'm a member of/assist in:

- Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) 4
- Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) 5
- Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS) 6
- Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) 7
- Radio Emergency Associated Communications Teams (REACT) 8
- The Red Cross 9
- Salvation Army Disaster Services 10
- SKYWARN 11
- Other _____ 12
- I don't currently belong to a volunteer group, but I intend to join one 13
- I don't intend to join an organized group, but I volunteer my services when I can 14
- I am not interested in volunteer services 15

I maintain equipment for the express purpose of helping others:

- Yes 16
- No 17

I use the following equipment in my volunteer capacity:

- CB 18
- GMRS 19
- FRS 20
- Weather Radio 21
- Scanner 22
- Amateur radio 23
- Business band radio 24
- Marine VHF radio 25
- Other _____ 26