

CHAPTER 21

SERVICES FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

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21.1 Introduction

21.1.1 This chapter deals with those services to the general public not covered in other chapters. In particular the reader is referred to Annex A of chapter 1 for details of the Public Meteorological Service.

21.2 The free public telephone service

21.2.1 Part of the defined 'Public Meteorological Service (See Annex A to chapter 1) is the facility which enables members of the public to talk directly to forecast room staff at no extra charge by means of direct exchange telephone lines connected to forecast offices. The numbers of these lines are publicized in British Telecom Phonebooks. In recent years, with increasing pressure to maximize commercial returns from services, the provision of public access to forecast offices has been reduced, in most cases to a single line, and at certain designated offices only. With the continued pressure on staff resources, access from the general public to forecasters at stations whose primary role is to provide forecasts to the military has also been curtailed and in many cases their direct exchange line numbers have been changed and/or removed from British Telecom listings. At the same time facilities for providing paying services have increased and the amount of forecast information available at little cost to members of the general public is very wide-ranging.

21.2.2 Offices which are authorized to provide free forecasts and advice to members of the general public are listed in Annex B to chapter 1. All public enquiries received at other stations, except as described below, should be politely referred to the appropriate authorized office or to premium-rate telephone services. CFO is **not** designated as a public enquiry office. Switchboard operators at Bracknell connect only authorized callers (e.g. R/T calls from commercial ships at sea) and refer others seeking current weather information to LWC. CFO telephone extensions and ex-directory numbers must not be disclosed to members of the public.

21.2.3 S&B(Defence) stations may provide services to specified contacts of Station Commanders when this is judged to be in the interest of the military unit and its operational activities. Officers-in-Charge should maintain a list of such contacts. Additionally, where calls relate to specific emergency situations, services should be provided as necessary to meet the demands of the situation. Stations designated to deal with requests in connection with the accidental release of nuclear material or of toxic chemicals are detailed in chapter 22.

21.2.4 All calls on public lines are to be handled personally whenever possible. This is particularly important during normal office hours when The Met. Office aims to provide a good service to the public. Such calls may be dealt with by administrative staff, but no matter who handles the call the aim must be for a quick, courteous and personal response.

21.2.5 Procedures for ascertaining the type of query are to be laid down by the Regional Manager or Manager; potential commercial or non-forecast enquiries can then be directed to the correct person. Callers requiring forecast information should normally be referred politely to the appropriate Telephone Information Service (TIS) number, e.g. Weathercall, Marinecall (callers must be told of their premium rating). In certain circumstances a forecast may be provided, e.g. in potential hazard to life situations (potholing or climbing accidents, severe weather, etc.) or when adverse and serious publicity could result by not giving a forecast. A brief forecast may also be appropriate if asked for during an enquiry on another matter.

21.2.6 If there are insufficient staff resources to answer public calls personally an answerphone may be used on the judgement of the Regional Manager or Manager or duty forecaster. **It should rarely be resorted to during normal office hours and then not for extended periods.** The answerphone message should contain a short preamble which apologizes for staff not being able to answer personally. Callers should then be referred to relevant Weathercall and, if appropriate, Marinecall numbers and to the Commercial Manager's number. It should be made clear that the latter is not for obtaining a current forecast.

21.2.7 If severe weather is occurring in the area and calls cannot be answered personally, a short forecast giving expected developments is to replace the usual message on the answerphone. The forecast must be kept up to date.

21.3 Sales from the trailer, foyer shop and counters at WCs

21.3.1 Where facilities are suitable, certain items may be offered for sale from the trailer, the main foyer at Bracknell and from counters set up for the purpose at WCs. The main aim is to support the primary commercial activity of the Office, i.e. the sale of information and services, by making the Weather Centre more visible and increasing interest from the public. Only in exceptional circumstances is this activity likely to recover the cost of dedicated manning of a shop or counter, which will therefore normally be a secondary responsibility of a member of the administrative staff.

21.3.2 Items available for sale fall into several categories:

- a. In-house material, produced at the WC or at Bracknell.
- b. HMSO publications.
- c. Royal Meteorological Society items.
- d. Promotional and other items arranged through S&B (Marketing), e.g. umbrellas.
- e. Met. Office Social and Sports Association (MOSSA) items.
- f. Meteorological instruments.

Further items may be added to this list with the approval of S&B (Marketing) who will discuss proposals with F&A.

21.3.3 Items, except for those produced locally, will normally be obtained from S&B (Marketing). For each category of item a stock book will be maintained, containing for each quarter a record of:

- a. Number of items in stock at start and end of period.
- b. Number of items received.
- c. Number of items sold.
- d. Number of items returned.

21.3.4 Separate records should be made for VAT-inclusive and zero-rated items (publications). Although all receipts are credited to the WC concerned, only those for VAT-liable items are paid to an Office revenue vote, all receipts from publications being credited to HMSO votes. Quarterly, a copy of the record should be forwarded to S&B (Marketing), using MOD Form 151A. They will collate items and notify F&A who will make payments to external suppliers (including the Royal Meteorological Society, MOSSA, etc.).

21.3.5 Precautions should be taken to safeguard monies received from sales and a secure lockable drawer should be used. All receipts from the sale of items should be forwarded quarterly to F&A Cashier via a local bank using the Girobank slip attached to Metform 4951, and all monies in excess of that required to maintain a reasonable 'float' should be similarly forwarded at any time. Precautions should also be taken to ensure the security of stocks.

21.4 Complaints and other enquiries

21.4.1 All public complaints, other than the trivial, must be forwarded to the Enquiries Officer in the Press Office at Bracknell. It is his responsibility to answer them and monitor the subjects which concern people most, in order that solutions may be found.

21.4.2 Enquiries from the public that cannot be answered easily at a forecast office may also be referred to the Enquiries Officer at Bracknell.