

**AMERICAN METEOROLOGICAL SOCIETY  
NEWS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**NATIONAL ROAD WEATHER RESEARCH PROGRAM  
WOULD MAKE HIGHWAYS SAFER, MORE EFFICIENT**

With countless lives and millions of dollars at stake each day, the nation's highway system could benefit significantly from a federally-funded national road weather research program that was coordinated among various public, private and academic communities that have a stake in it. That was the major finding from a two-day policy forum hosted on November 4-5, 2003 by the American Meteorological Society (AMS).

The United States, and more specifically its economy, is highly dependent on the national highway system. More than 200 million cars and trucks use the national highway system and critical parts function at or near their maximum capacity much of the time, according to government studies. And bad weather can throw a major kink into the system – reducing capacity and efficiency.

Weather also is also a key to highway safety. In the United States each year, approximately 7,000 highway deaths and 800,000 injuries are associated with poor weather driving conditions. The estimated annual economic cost from these approximate 1.2 million weather-related crashes (deaths, injuries, and property) amounts to nearly \$42 billion.

"It is clear that the societal and economic impacts of bad weather on the highway system are huge," said Richard Greenfield, Senior Policy Fellow with the AMS and organizer of the policy forum. "The forum participants recommended a federal, long-term and well-funded national program that studies, develops and coordinates how we use weather information to make our nation's highways safer and more efficient. The participants noted that such a program, along with increased coordination between the public, private and academic organizations play a role the highway system, will ultimately benefit all who travel on our roads."

The goal of the "AMS Weather and Highways Forum," was to provide findings and recommendations that will increase the safety, reliability, and efficiency of the nation's highway system through more effective use of weather information.

Approximately 100 representatives of the weather information providers; transportation managers and users; and policy makers knowledgeable about the nation's highway system participated in the forum. The representatives were drawn from the public and private sectors at the national, state, and local levels.

Specifically, the report recommendation calls for the Federal Highway Administration to lead the development of a national road weather research, development, and applications

program in partnership with NOAA, the National Science Foundation and other federal, state and local agencies.

“The forum has just provided a framework to get the program underway,” added Greenfield. “The specific details on who does what and where will still need to be worked out. But what’s most important is that Congress establish a national road weather management program that develops tools and systems that bring weather information to those that are impacted by weather on the roads and those that have to make safety and operational decisions.”

The report also recommends better communication between the meteorological community and those that must use the weather information– state Departments of Transportation representatives, the driving public, emergency managers, and trucking companies.

The forum discussions also led to more specific recommendations on:

- Establishing a national road weather data collection and dissemination infrastructure that would make weather condition information accessible in vehicles and at road-side kiosks;
- Improved weather observation systems. For example, specifically focused observations and forecasts near the road surface where drivers experience fog, ice, snow, wind, rain, and more; more timely observations; improved forecasts for bridges;
- Better training and road weather education so that the driving public could more effectively use weather data, and
- Incentives for vehicle manufacturers and highway engineers to raise public and private sector demand for in-vehicle road weather information

The report, now available on the AMS Website ([www.ametsoc.org/atmospolicy](http://www.ametsoc.org/atmospolicy)), will be distributed throughout the meteorological and transportation community, as well as federal, state and local legislatures.

The American Meteorological Society (AMS) is a scientific and professional society of more than 11,000 members from the United States and over 100 foreign countries. The Society has long promoted the link between scientific issues and policy decisions. This is the fourth forum in the AMS Atmospheric Policy Program’s Policy Study Series. For more information regarding the series, please go to [www.ametsoc.org/atmospolicy](http://www.ametsoc.org/atmospolicy)

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Editor’s Note: Copies of the report are available on the AMS Web site at <http://www.ametsoc.org/atmospolicy> or you may obtain a hard copy from Genevieve Fisher at (202) 737-9006, ext. 422.