

**SUSQUEHANNA RIVER BASIN COMMISSION**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**SRBC and NWS TO PROVIDE FREE RIVER ICE  
OBSERVATION TRAINING FOR RESIDENTS AND  
EMERGENCY OFFICIALS**

*The West Branch and Main Stem Susquehanna Confluence Area Needs Ice Observers*

Harrisburg, Pa. – The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC), the National Weather Service (NWS) and Union County Emergency Services today announced that they will conduct a workshop to train residents and local, county and state emergency management officials to serve as Volunteer River Ice Observers. The training will cover the types of river ice, river ice formation, how ice jams progress and how to safely collect ice data. In preparation for the coming winter, the organizations are working together to conduct Ice Observer training in the West Branch and main stem Susquehanna confluence area.

The training session will take place on Monday, February 9 at the Union Township Fire Company, 43 Reitz Ave. in Winfield, Pa. at 7:00 p.m. Registration forms and more information about the Ice Observer Program are available on SRBC's web site at [www.srbc.net](http://www.srbc.net). To register by phone or e-mail, please contact Mattie Buskirk at SRBC – ph. 717-238-0423, x304 or e-mail. [mbuskirk@srbc.net](mailto:mbuskirk@srbc.net).

Volunteer River Ice Observers report local ice conditions to NWS once a week via a toll-free phone number. This information helps NWS to forecast appropriate river heights and crest movements in many streams, creeks and rivers.

SRBC executive director Paul Swartz noted that this program is important in the Susquehanna River Basin because most streams and rivers are prone to bank-to-bank icing during the colder winter months, which can lead to late-winter and early-spring flooding when the ice begins to flow and jam.

“Reports from the volunteers about local ice activity are vital to protecting the many flood-prone communities and the costly infrastructure in the Susquehanna basin,” said Swartz. “The volunteer observers play a key role by monitoring and reporting potential ice hazards as they occur, and having observers in the West Branch and main stem Susquehanna confluence region really enhances the cooperative basin-wide ice monitoring program.”

NWS incorporates river ice observations into winter flood forecasts. Following the devastating ice jam-induced flood in 1996, NWS established a program to train volunteer river ice observers in several areas of the Susquehanna River Basin. The program has been very successful in the watersheds where volunteer river ice observers are active,

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including in early 2003 when bank-to-bank ice on the Susquehanna River called for constant monitoring, especially as the ice began breaking up and moving.

“Ice reports from our volunteer observers have proven to be a valuable tool in the NWS river watch and warning program in central Pennsylvania,” said Peter Jung, Senior Service Hydrologist with the State College NWS office. “The addition of new observers in the West Branch and confluence area will only help to further assist NWS meteorologists and hydrologists in their mission to save lives and protect property.”

“We can’t control or prevent the times when Mother Nature wreaks havoc on us, but we are very fortunate to have citizens in the West Branch and main stem Susquehanna confluence area who are interested and taking an active role in monitoring the watershed to enhance the quality of life. We’re pleased to promote and support the volunteer ice monitoring program,” said Tom Hess, Executive Director of Union County Emergency Services.

The ice-jam flood in January 1996 cost 14 lives and \$600 million in damages, breaking records as being the third worst flood in the Susquehanna basin. The entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was declared a federal disaster area. Since that flood, the help of the volunteer ice observers and technological improvements have better prepared the Susquehanna basin to predict potential ice-induced flooding.

SRBC is the governing agency established by the federal government and the states of New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland to protect and wisely manage the water resources of the Susquehanna River Basin Commission. The Susquehanna River starts in Cooperstown, N.Y., and flows 444 miles to Havre de Grace, Md., where the river meets the Chesapeake Bay.

NWS provides weather, hydrologic and climate forecasts and warnings for the United States, its territories, adjacent waters and ocean areas, for the protection of life and property and the enhancement of the national economy. NWS data and products form a national information database and infrastructure that can be used by other governmental agencies, the private sector, the public and the global community.

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