

## Media release – for immediate release

14 May 2019

# Changes to the official Severe Weather Warnings

MetService, New Zealand's only authorised provider of Severe Weather Watches and Warnings, is enhancing the way it communicates public alerts for severe weather.

From 21 May, MetService is introducing a new level of warning reserved for the most extreme weather events, as well as new colours and graphics, to more clearly signify the type of alert in place.

MetService provides land-based severe weather alerts through a system of Outlooks, Watches and Warnings.

There will now be two levels of warnings for heavy rain, strong wind or heavy snow: an **Orange Warning** (orange hexagon graphic) and a **Red Warning** (red triangle graphic).

An **Orange Warning** will be issued when heavy rain, strong wind or heavy snow is forecast to meet warning criteria. It signifies that people need to be prepared and **take action** as appropriate as there could be some disruption to their day and potential risk to people, animals and property. The majority of warnings issued by MetService will be orange.

A **Red Warning** will be reserved for only the most extreme weather events, such as the severe weather resulting from ex-tropical cyclones, where significant impact and disruption is expected. It signifies that people need to **act now** as **immediate action is required** to protect people, animals and property from the impact of the weather. People should also be prepared to follow the advice of official authorities and emergency services.

During 2018, MetService recorded 56 severe weather events in New Zealand that reached warning criteria requiring Severe Weather Warnings to be issued.

MetService General Manager, Meteorological Operations, Ramon Oosterkamp, says the changes will make it easier for everyone to understand the severity of the expected weather.

"We know that 'severe weather' means different things to different people. By introducing these changes, we aim to give people greater clarity about what to expect, enabling them to be better prepared for the particular weather conditions."

Oosterkamp says the introduction of two levels of warnings is about the need to really draw attention to our most extreme events, particularly as climate scientists expect greater severity of weather events due to climate change.

"There are times when we know the expected weather will be extremely severe, such as the recent heavy rain in Westland, which caused colossal damage and the tragic loss of a life. At

these times we really need to capture everyone's attention and let them know, this is really extreme weather and to take action!"

"Flagging an event with a Red Warning will only happen after careful consideration and peer review by our severe weather team at MetService. Where appropriate, we will discuss the pending event with Councils or Civil Defence."

The use of colour-coded warnings linked to impacts is recommended by the World Meteorological Organisation, of which the MetService is a member.

MetService's Severe Weather **Watches** will now be identified with a yellow circle graphic. During a Watch we ask that people be alert, to be prepared for bad weather, and to keep up-to-date with advice from MetService as a Warning is possible.

"We are urging media outlets to adopt the same practice for communicating severe weather events, because we know that a consistent message across all channels is the most effective way of communicating with the public."

Oosterkamp says the criteria for determining when forecast weather requires an Outlook, Watch or Warning will not change.

## **ENDS**

### **For more information or to request an interview please contact:**

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **Examples of past severe weather events that might have justified a Red Warning;**

- **The heavy rain event in Westland** in late March 2019 which caused colossal damage including the washout of the Waiho Bridge.
- **Cyclone Gita** that hit New Zealand in February 2018 which caused widespread damage, bringing floods and damaging winds to parts of the country, resulting in several local States of Emergency being declared.
- **The Auckland windstorm** in April 2018 where wind gusts reached rarely seen speeds of 140km/h causing significant damage in the Auckland area and resulting in power outages affecting tens of thousands of homes.
- **The polar blast** that brought snow to Wellington city in 2011 causing power outages, road closures, treacherous driving conditions and public transport cancellations.

## Severe Weather Watches:



### A **Watch - stay alert**

Watches will now adopt a yellow colour-code. When a Watch is in place, stay alert and keep an eye on your local forecast for updates. Watches are used when severe weather is possible, but not imminent or certain.

## Severe Weather Warnings:



### **Orange Warnings – take action**

Used when the forecast indicates incoming bad weather (expected heavy rain, strong wind or heavy snow) will meet our Severe Weather Criteria. It signifies that people need to be prepared and **take action** as appropriate as there could be some disruption to their day and potential risk to people, animals and property. The majority of Warnings issued by MetService will be orange.



### **Red Warnings - take immediate action, act now!**

Reserved for only the most extreme weather events, such as heavy rain, strong wind or heavy snow related to events like ex-tropical cyclones, that are likely to have significant impact and disruption. It signifies that people need to **act now** as **immediate action is required** to protect people, animals and property from the impact of the weather. People should also be prepared to follow the advice of official authorities and emergency services.

To get the most up-to-date information on severe weather around the country, sign up for our Watches and Warnings notifications on [metservice.com](https://www.metservice.com) or download the [MetService mobile app](#).

## Images and video

Please use the following dropbox link to find:

- New severe weather icons image
- PDF infosheet detailing severe weather criteria
- A one-minute video with MetService Head of Weather Communications Lisa Murray explaining the changes

### Dropbox Link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/jgff6ujmxjl4v5g/AABKC4SBCleCthIDYI4ZIW3la?dl=0>

## **About MetService**

MetService is New Zealand's National Meteorological Service and the only authorised provider of Severe Weather Watches and Warnings. As a State-Owned Enterprise its core purpose is to protect the safety of life and property in New Zealand while operating as a commercial business. MetService recently emerged as one of the highest rated agencies in Colmar Brunton's annual survey of reputation in the public sector. <http://www.colmarbrunton.co.nz/opinion-does-our-public-sector-measure-up/>