

Educating the Public About Storm-Based Warnings

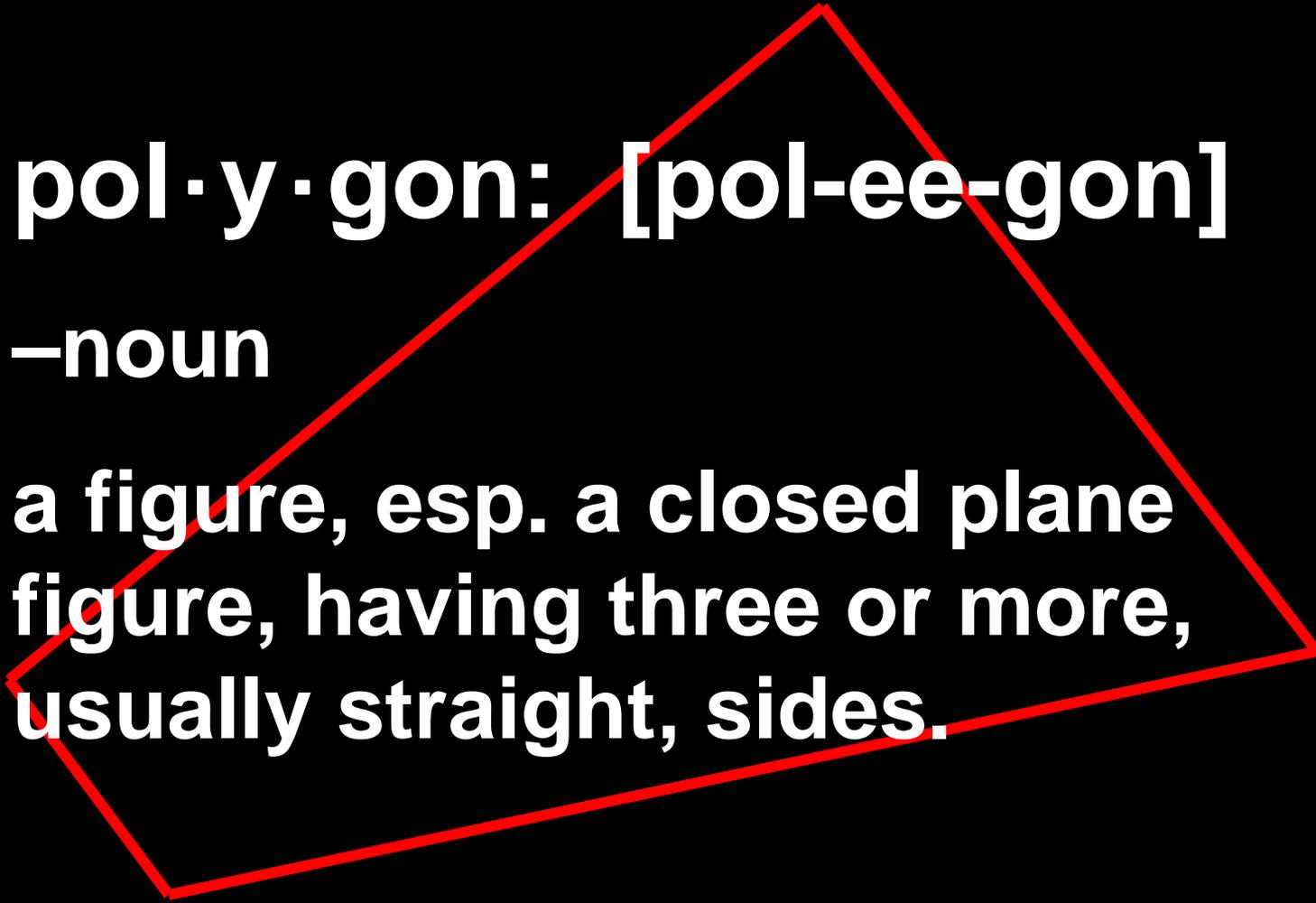
Lessons Learned from 2008 & 2009

2010 Severe Weather Workshop

Norman, OK

Valerie Ritterbusch





pol·y·gon: [pol-ee-gon]

–noun

a figure, esp. a closed plane figure, having three or more, usually straight, sides.

What's WeatherCall's definition of "polygon"?



It's a word you never, *EVER* use when talking with the general public.

A typical day in the life of a
WeatherCall Customer Care
Representative

“Your system STINKS.
The sirens were going off,
and I didn’t get a call”.



“My weather radio went off 5
TIMES, and you didn’t call me
even one time”!



“The wind was howling, lightning striking all around us, and NO CALL. This thing is useless”.



“And furthermore, you
^!*%#*%&^!>'s
took my MONEY”!



WAL*MART | MoneyCenter

MoneyGram® Money Orders

The Easy Way to Send Money

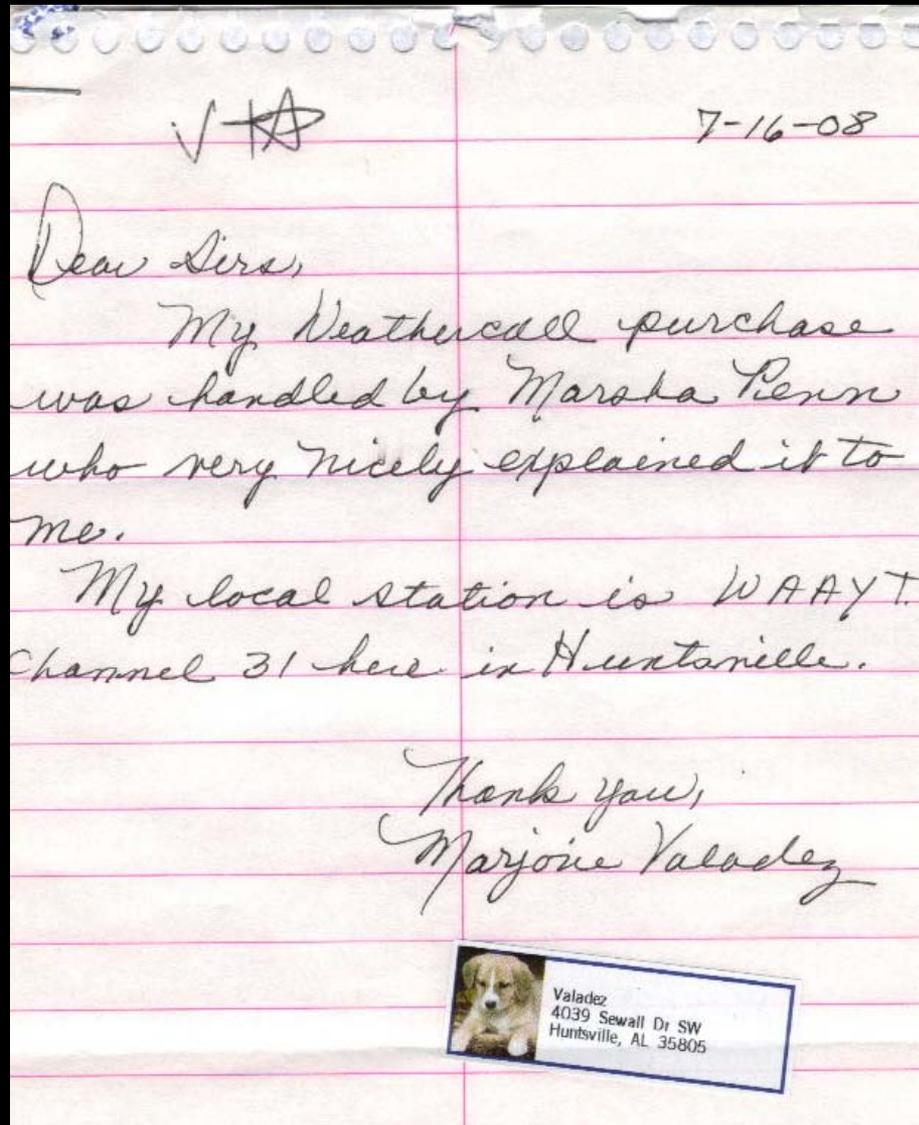
A photograph of a woman with dark hair hugging a young boy from behind. The boy is wearing a green and white striped shirt and is smiling. The woman is also smiling and looking down at the boy. The background is a plain, light color.

Or, just as typical:

“I’m sorry to bother you. I just want to make sure my account is set up right because our TV weatherman said there was a tornado in our county and I didn’t get a call. Thank you so much, and God bless”.



The folks who would call the toll free # with these questions typically registered via the mail:



✓ ~~★~~

7-16-08

Dear Sirs,

My Weathercall purchase was handled by Marsha Penn who very nicely explained it to me.

My local station is WAAY-TV Channel 31 here in Huntsville.

Thank you,
Marjorie Valadez



Valadez
4039 Sewall Dr SW
Huntsville, AL 35805

Marsha Penn put me in the
system & I'm paying for it.

wpde vta

Bessie Taylor
1-843-464-0846



Bessie Taylor

331 Dixon St.

Mullins, SC 29574-2903



Please fill out this form completely. If you are registering more than ONE LOCATION, please use a separate form for each. Include a Certified Check or Money Order for \$6.95 for EACH location you are registering. Please mail to:

WeatherCall
P.O. Box 472
Parker, CO 80134

You may enter up to 3 telephone numbers and 3 email addresses for each location. Please print as legibly as possible!!!

First Name: Dicie

Last Name: Scott

Street Address: 1345 BROWN ST. APT 105 BOAZ, ALA
(No Post Office Boxes, Mail Stops, Rural Routes, Farm-to-Market etc. You must provide a PHYSICAL STREET ADDRESS for our system to locate you).

City: Boaz Ala.

State: Ala. Zip Code: 35957

Telephone #1 (Area Code + 7 Digits): 1.256 593: 3476

Select Warning types: Tornado Severe Thunderstorm Flash Flood
(Email/SMS Only)

Telephone #2 (Area Code + 7 Digits): _____

Select Warning types: Tornado Severe Thunderstorm Flash Flood
(Email/SMS Only)

Telephone #3 (Area Code + 7 Digits): _____

Select Warning types: Tornado Severe Thunderstorm Flash Flood
(Email/SMS Only)

Email Address #1 _____

Select Warning types: Tornado Severe Thunderstorm Flash Flood

Email Address #2 _____

Select Warning types: Tornado Severe Thunderstorm Flash Flood

Email Address #3 _____

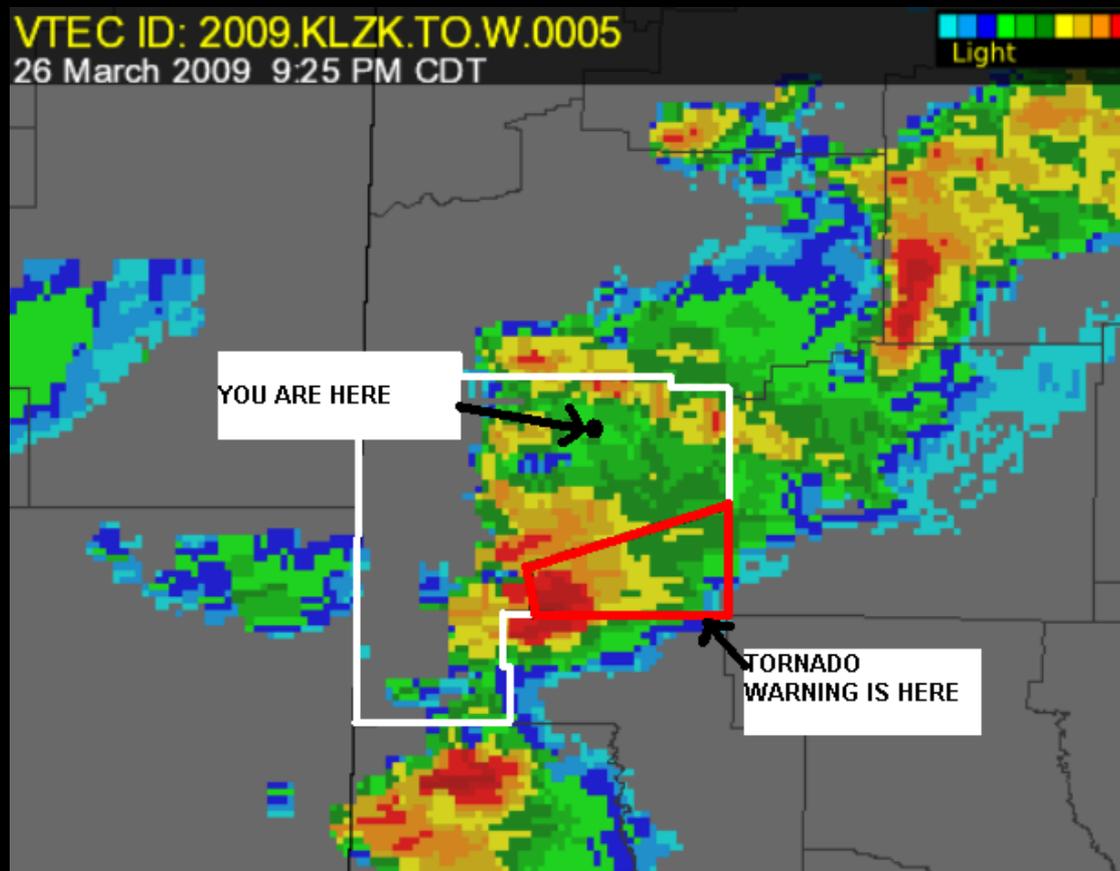
Select Warning types: Tornado Severe Thunderstorm Flash Flood

Thank you for subscribing to WeatherCall.

In 2008 we fielded literally thousands of “I didn’t get a call” inquiries.

- We hired a newly graduated met from Mizzou to research each inquiry.
- He would research the storm data and email or snail-mail them an explanation and a graphic of warning polygons in their county that they did NOT fall inside of.

While extremely effective in helping users understand WHY they did not get a call, it was NOT cost effective.



We needed an efficient way to SHOW subscribers why they didn't get a call when a warning was issued for their county.



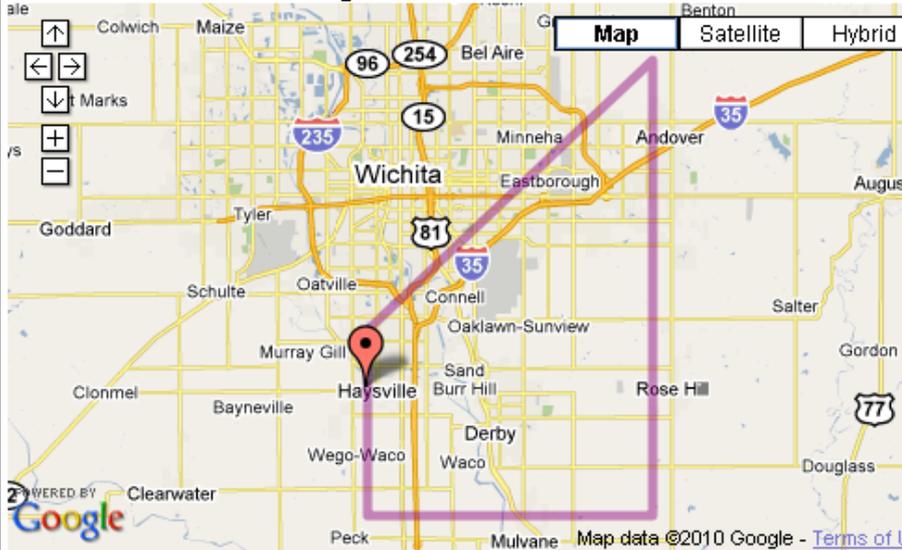
We were learning the true value of the saying
“A picture is worth a thousand words”.

We had to figure out a way to explain “Why no call” without using the “P” word.

2009-08-15 17:05:49

WUUS53 KICT 152305

Severe Thunderstorm Warning



BULLETIN - EAS ACTIVATION REQUESTED
SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WARNING
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE WICHITA KS
605 PM CDT SAT AUG 15 2009

THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE IN WICHITA HAS ISSUED A

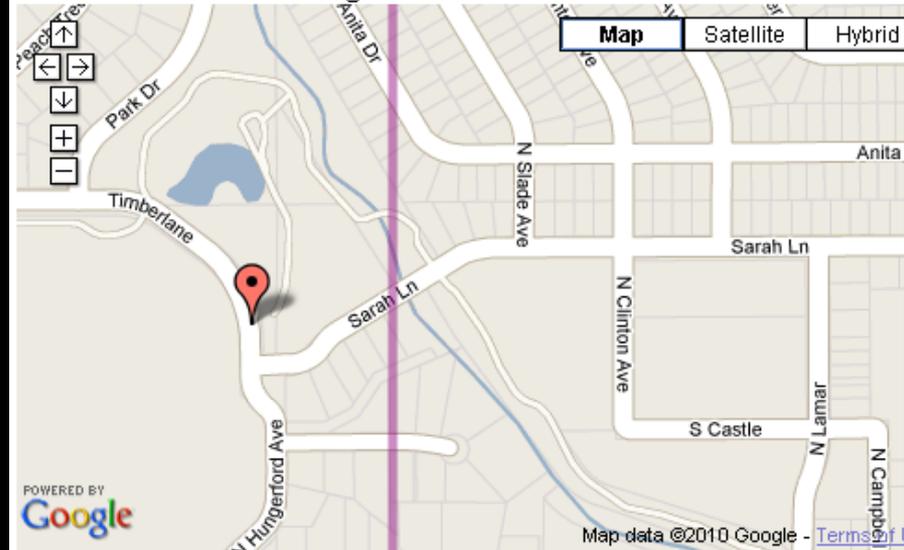
* SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WARNING FOR...
EASTERN SEDGWICK COUNTY IN SOUTH CENTRAL KANSAS.

* UNTIL 700 PM CDT.

2009-08-15 17:05:49

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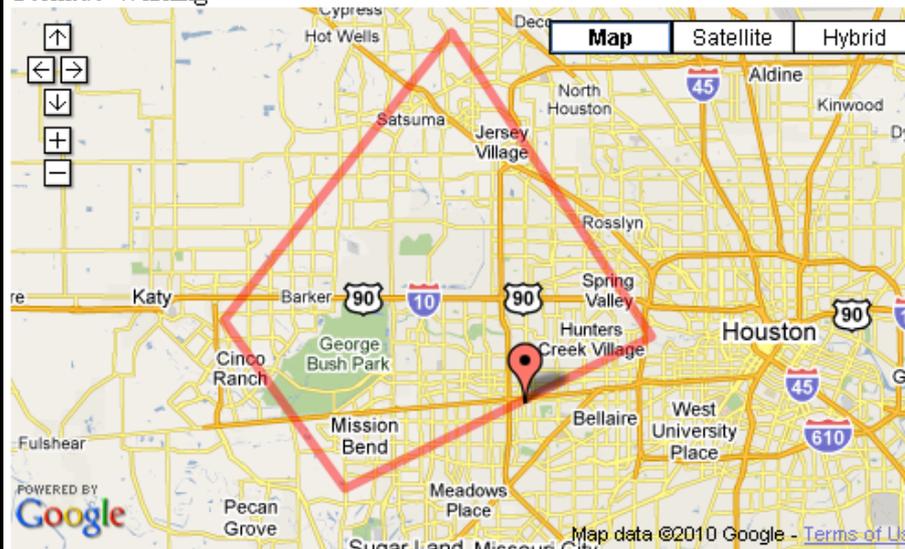
* UNTIL 700 PM CDT.

The answer was to show them a picture and also send SBW info to them.

2009-10-29 17:59:38

WFUS54 KHGX 292359

Tornado Warning



BULLETIN - EAS ACTIVATION REQUESTED

TORNADO WARNING

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE HOUSTON/GALVESTON TX

659 PM CDT THU OCT 29 2009

THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE IN LEAGUE CITY HAS ISSUED A

* TORNADO WARNING FOR...

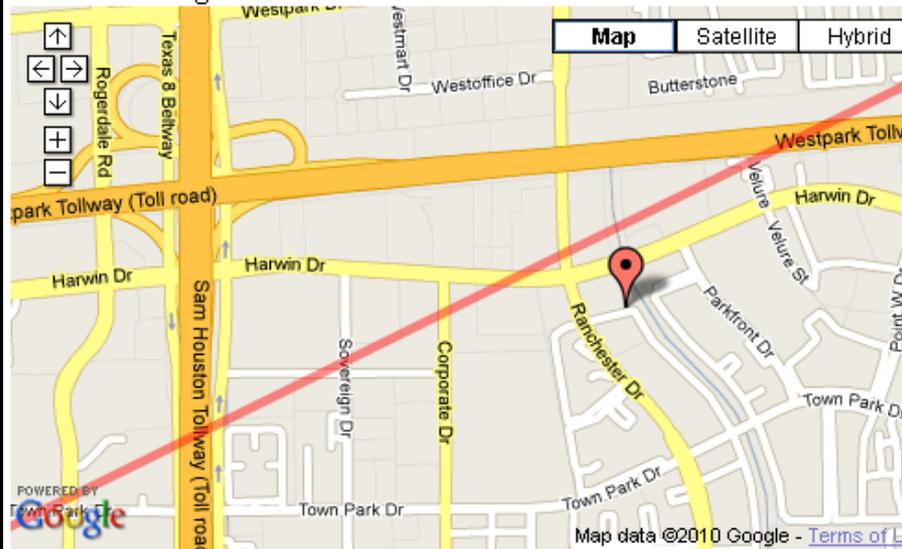
NORTHERN FORT BEND COUNTY IN SOUTHEAST TEXAS...

CENTRAL HARRIS COUNTY IN SOUTHEAST TEXAS...

2009-10-29 17:59:38

WFUS54 KHGX 292359

Tornado Warning



BULLETIN - EAS ACTIVATION REQUESTED

TORNADO WARNING

NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE HOUSTON/GALVESTON TX

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CENTRAL HARRIS COUNTY IN SOUTHEAST TEXAS...

**Most understand the graphic
and do a 180 degree turn-around.**

Others become argumentative.

- Case is elevated to management.
- We explain that *WeatherCall* is simply the messenger for official NWS warnings.
- If they are convinced the storm was right on top of them and they should have been included in the warning, we provide the contact information of the local NWS office.

If this doesn't resolve it:

- We politely explain that if they don't trust the new warning method, there are ways to receive county-wide warnings via a wx radio or other alerting systems that are free.
- We suggest they consider becoming part of the solution and attend a spotter training class.
- We offer to remove them from the system, refund their money, and suggest that they apply it toward purchasing a weather radio.

“I didn’t get a call”

- We take this question very seriously. The public has been over-warned for decades.
- People deserve an answer they can understand.
- The best way to accomplish this is by using a picture.
- Our broadcast partners play a vital role in continually explaining SBW’s in their weathercasts.

The efforts to educate pay off:

- Both KTUL in Tulsa and KATV in Little Rock grew very rapidly in spring of 2008. They spent a LOT of time responding to “I didn’t get a call” inquiries.
- Both stations independently reported that the volume of inquiries dropped dramatically in 2009, even as their subscribership continued to grow.
- The more people understand about how SBW’s work, the more they learn to trust the system.

Our Unofficial Company Motto:

“Close only counts
in horse-shoes and hand grenades”.



In Conclusion:

- While commonly used by the people in this room, the word “polygon” can be very intimidating to the general public.
- Show them a picture whenever possible to gain their trust.



Valerie Ritterbusch
valerie@weathercall.net
720-842-1180