VISITVIEW – DISTANCE LEARNING TOOL FOR OPERATIONAL WEATHER FORECASTERS

Anthony Mostek\textsuperscript{1} and Thomas Whittaker\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} National Weather Service, Office of Climate, Water, and Weather Services, Boulder, Colorado USA
\textsuperscript{2} Cooperative Institute for Meteorological Satellite Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin USA

ABSTRACT

The Virtual Institute for Satellite Integration Training (VISIT) provides distance learning for operational forecasters in National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Weather Service (NWS). Begun in 1999, the VISIT project is comprised of staff from the Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere (CIRA), the Cooperative Institute for Meteorological Satellite Studies (CIMSS), the Warning Decision Training Branch (WDTB), and other NWS training centers. Teletraining topics are varied, but tend to stress the use of multi-sensor data types with a focus on satellite.

Early in the project, VISIT discovered it needed to create its own interactive presentation software with specific capabilities not commercially available. To address this need, the VISIT team developed a software package called VISITview. This distance-learning (or “teletraining”) software allows users in various locations to simultaneously view and manipulate the images, animations, graphics and text, and stresses the unique capabilities required such as animations and color enhancements. Each participating office needs only a computer with an internet connection and a telephone (or voice-over-IP). The VISITview software is utilized by other NOAA training teams, such as Numerical Weather Prediction, Interactive Forecast Preparation System, Climate, Aviation, NESDIS and NPOESS. VISITview is used by the Cooperative program for meteorological Education and Training (COMET) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The software also can be easily used for real-time collaborations.

The strength of the VISIT teletraining instructional approach is its ability to bring the instructor into direct contact with forecast offices. The interaction between instructor and students establishes an active link that can be difficult to achieve other than with face-to-face instruction. This approach substantially reduces the cost of training forecasters in the latest techniques, while still offering a sense of community within the organization. From April 1999 through September 2003, the training provided by VISIT has resulted in the following:

- 711 sessions conducted
- Over 3500 participating offices
- Over 11,500 certificates issued

The 3500 participating offices include many offices that have participated in multiple sessions. All 121 NWS forecast offices have participated including San Juan, Puerto Rico, three offices in Alaska and two in Pacific region. Other organizations participating in VISITview teletraining include the Navy, NESDIS, Emergency Managers, Federal Aviation Administration, the Meteorological Service of Canada, and the WMO. The presentation will provide a general overview of the VISIT project with some training statistics. The teletraining software used by the VISIT program will be reviewed, some examples of VISIT sessions will be shown and the potential to expand VISITview use through the WMO will be discussed.