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1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, tragic weather stories have dominated national headlines and appropriately so. But what about weather events that only impact a small population of our Designated Market Areas? Despite what the newsroom may say, all weather events deserve ample coverage and explanation. That's where we as station scientists have the opportunity to go beyond our titles, connect with viewers on a personal level, and get out of the building.

2. EXPLAINING "WHAT"

It began as a relatively normal summer day. The Storm Prediction Center had issued a Slight Risk for southern Illinois July 11th, 2010. I watched the radar diligently as a single cell storm developed in a matter of minutes and intensified over Williamson County, one of our more populated areas. Much to my surprise, no warnings were issued, yet reports, pictures and videos began to pour in.

While the storm itself impacted just a small percentage of our viewers, severe storms like this are common and can strike any part of the Midwest year round. I took this event as an opportunity to educate the public on what caused the damage and how the local National Weather Service reached their conclusion. The story involved trailing the NWS Warning Coordination Meteorologist, viewer videos and photos, and an explanation of the culprit, a microburst with sustained winds of 75 miles per hour.

3. GOING BEYOND THE CAUSE

The conclusion as to what caused the

damage didn't heal the scars that were ingrained on the surrounding land and its people. Sharing stories of those impacted by the storm help viewers relate to the event, even if they were not in the storm's path *this* time.

At its strongest the single cell storm produced not only hurricane strength wind but golf ball size hail that destroyed more than two-dozen acres of freshly planted pumpkins. Devastation overwhelmed the farmer, whose income depends on his pumpkin yield. I joined him for a follow-up story on his harvest in October. Much to his and my surprise, his loss was minute compared to what could have been debilitating.

4. ANY WEATHER EVENT IS A STORY

This same practice can be done for any weather event from drought to flood. Lack of rainfall impacts agriculture, local vineyards and wines, and leaf color in the fall, for example. On the other hand a tremendous amount of spring flooding in the Midwest meant I was constantly in high water May 2011, sharing people's tragic stories of loss and rebuilding after arguably the greatest flood in the mid Mississippi River Valley's history.

I must note an important lesson that I have learned in my short television career: try and refrain from incorporating yourself into the story, unless you are directly impacted personally.

5. CONNECTING WITH VIEWERS ON A PERSONAL LEVEL

Being in the field with those who are impacted and sharing their stories remind viewers that we are more than just forecasters. And as station scientists we are obliged to do more than tell what's going on outside viewers' windows; we should explain *why* and show *how* an event impacts its people.

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