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Weather monitor pushes envelope in Oklahoma

By: Bryan Painter / The Oklahoman

NORMAN — What's the difference? In Oklahoma this is a loaded question when pertaining to weather conditions.

A year ago, Oklahoma City Micronet made its official debut during a commissioning ceremony that took place at the National Weather Festival at the National Weather Center in Norman.

Oklahoma City Micronet was designed over a five-year period to improve atmospheric monitoring across the metropolitan area. On any given day there can be weather differences throughout the 40-site network of real time weather stations across Oklahoma City.

The fifth annual National Weather Festival is from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at the National Weather Center, 120 David L. Boren Blvd., in Norman. The free event open to everyone features tours, children's activities and displays.

So I thought this would be a good opportunity to look at the Oklahoma City Micronet, which consists of four land stations, like those throughout the state in the overall Oklahoma Mesonet, in addition to 36 miniature weather stations mounted on top of Oklahoma City traffic signals.

"It has been a tremendous year for OKCNET, even better than I had hoped," said Jeff Basara, director of research for the Oklahoma Climatological Survey.

"The network has been very stable from an operations standpoint and has collected some rather unique observations from a number of rather interesting events."

Basara said the field of urban meteorology is still, in many ways, untapped. The primary reason is the lack of quality observations in urban areas, he added.

"OKCNET was designed to fill that void," Basara said, "and due to the constant data collection for all weather conditions, we've collected extremely valuable data that is really going to advance our overall understanding of urban-atmosphere interactions."

Also, the city of Oklahoma City, in particular the department of Public Works, uses the data to watch for heavy rain in known trouble spots as well as freezing temperatures that may affect road conditions in the area, Basara said.

"One aspect that really sets OKCNET apart from any other network of its kind is that we collect research-quality data every minute and can detect rapidly changing conditions," Basara said. "In many ways, there is nothing like it in the world and we've begun to receive inquiries from individuals, teams and organizations from other cities in the U.S. and even foreign countries.

"For me, it is exciting to know, that like the Mesonet, we're pushing the envelope," he said.



A weather balloon is released Saturday Nov. 8, 2008 during the National Weather Center festival in Norman, OK. BY JACONNA AGUIRRE