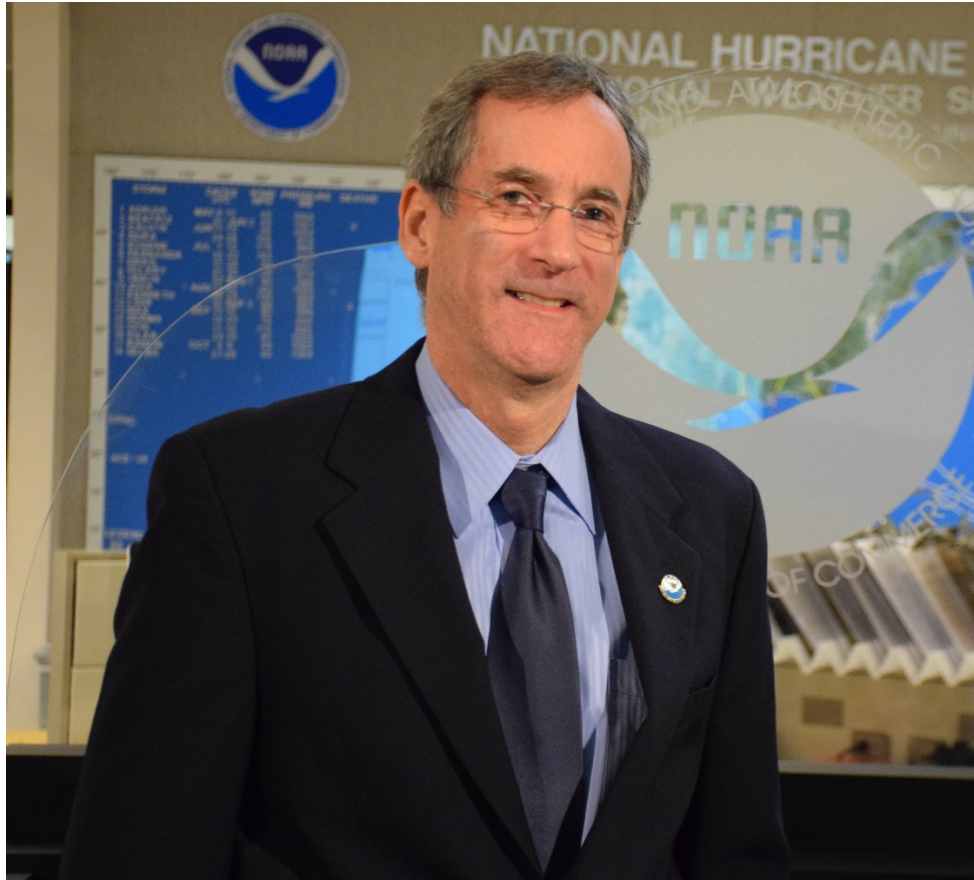


Dr. Edward Rappaport retires from federal service

Served as NHC Deputy Director since 2000



Editor's note: Edward Rappaport, Ph.D., has been with NOAA's National Hurricane Center (NHC) for 33 years. Since 2000, he served as its Deputy Director and, in stints totaling seven years—including the 2007 and 2017 hurricane season, its acting director. His more than 40-year career in meteorology comprises positions in forecasting, research, administration, management, academia and the media. He sat down with NHC Communications Officer Dennis Feltgen with some thoughts about his retirement.

Did retirement arrive faster than you thought?

Yes and no. My wife has said that, when she retires, she wants me to retire. And, since I'm the deputy director at home as well as in the office, when she says it's time to go, it's time to go.

Former NHC director Bill Read used to say that anyone who gets into meteorology has a defective weather gene. What triggered your interest?

It turns out he was right. I am related to Seymour Hess, a former chair of the FSU meteorology department. When my grandfather learned I was going to be a meteorologist, he said "another

one?”. And apparently, when I was about 3 years old, my mother found me with my arms propped up on the windowsill, watching it raining outside. Given that it was in Los Angeles, where it almost never rains, it was something that caught my attention and stayed with me.

Was tropical meteorology your early interest?

No, but a chance occurrence made it so. When I took my first meteorology course at the University of Washington, the professor said he just received some grant money and is looking for a student to help me out. I thought, sure! Turns out it was for an analysis of tropical weather. And the funny part is, he realized and admitted later that he had asked the wrong person, mistaking me for a better student!

The changes in hurricane forecasting from then until now are dramatic.

I've been fortunate to be a part of that and have worked with some wonderful people. One of those advances is where we designed some of the first graphics that are now used on our website. It was the first time we'd used computer-generated graphics. One of the first things I did here at NHC was to write the software to generate those graphics.

Is there any job here at NHC you have not done?

Well, I've not done yours (public affairs). I started here as a post-doc and then worked in half a dozen other positions. Each one has its own challenges and each one was fun or exciting for different reasons. The job I liked most was at the very beginning in our applied research group when we were developing computer graphics for the first time and we were also successful in retaining hurricane reconnaissance in the Atlantic, eastern and central Pacific when it was being eliminated to the west of the dateline. That was very satisfying.

What accomplishment are you most proud of here?

It's being part of a public service effort that has led to a safer public.

Part of that is your work regarding the indirect deaths from tropical cyclones.

That's right. There's an expression "If you don't know where you're going, you won't know when you get there". It was never really quantified in what ways we were losing lives to tropical cyclones. I've spent a fair amount of time trying to document that to give us a better sense of direction and, along the way, realized that once we determined how many losses were due to storm surge and other weather and water hazards, that we'd been overlooking the category we now call indirect deaths. Through the history of tropical cyclones, we have this very important category that sometimes results in greater loss of life than what we know as direct deaths...such as, when power is lost, or during evacuations; and before, during and after the storm, the increase in heart attacks.

What is your next "best thing" in hurricane forecasting?

I'd love to see a focus now in our products, both at the national level with the National Hurricane Center and at the local level in text and graphics that highlight, at the appropriate time and appropriate places, the risk for the indirect deaths. In some places, that might be for falling trees. In other places, it might be for the misuse of generators, or the risks associated with travel during an evacuation. We know about them now, but we haven't highlighted or incorporated them yet in our own real-time products.

What are you going to do, now that your "director" says you're retiring?

We're fortunate to have a second place on the West coast, so we're going to split our time between South Florida winter and spring and the Oregon coast and environs for the summer and fall. My family is mainly from the west coast and hers is mainly on the east coast. We're looking forward to seeing more of this country and the world, more than we ever had the opportunity to do.

Any hobbies?

I've spent a fair amount of time looking at my family ancestry. I want to continue to do so and visit the places where my ancestors lived in previous centuries.

A parting thought?

A thank you to the staff here at the hurricane center and all the colleagues in the Weather Service, NOAA and beyond for making such a wonderful 30-plus years for me with the opportunity to have good times and to learn from all of you and, together, hopefully made a difference.



Dr. Ed Rappaport (seated) prepares the 5 a.m. August 24, 1992, advisory for Hurricane Andrew, with the help of hurricane specialists Dr. Richard Pasch, Max Mayfield and Hal Gerrish.



Dr. Ed Rappaport was an integral part of the NHC media pool. He provided more than 1,800 interviews/briefings for 36 U.S. landfall hurricane threats from 1999 to 2020.

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