

# GETTING THE WORD OUT

**A forecast is only useful if people know about it.**

By the early 1870s, most of the big cities in eastern Canada were connected by telegraph lines that let them send and receive information about the weather. Staff at the Toronto office of the Meteorological Service of Canada telegraphed forecasts to ports where someone would put up a flag or other warning to let ships' crews know a storm was coming. Crowds gathered at railway stations, post offices, libraries and other public places to read the posted forecast when it arrived by telegraph. When telephones started to become common in the early 1900s, people had to call an operator to be connected to the person they wanted to talk to. Operators memorized the day's forecast and repeated it to callers.



**"We work as hard at getting the forecast to Canadians as we do at the science of generating the forecast."**

*-David Phillips, senior climatologist,  
Environment and Climate  
Change Canada*



## ON TRACK

One of the most creative ways to spread weather information involved trains. Starting in the early 1880s, weather office staff would send the forecast to a railway station. The station agent would hang a disc on one of the cars to represent what to expect, using different discs for snow, clear weather, etc. Anyone who saw the train would also see the forecast, which was a huge help for farmers. But railway staff didn't always keep the discs up to date (maybe because they didn't get paid extra for the job) and the system was dropped after about 10 years.

Afternoon editions of newspapers started publishing weather information like the previous day's high and low temperatures almost as soon as the weather service started providing it. By the 1920s, Canadians could open any daily newspaper and read an official weather forecast. (They still can.) The arrival of radio was a huge step. Station staff could just call the closest weather office and get a full rundown to share with listeners. Most Canadian homes had a radio, so now they could get the latest weather news as they ate breakfast. In 1976, the government launched Weatheradio / Radiométéo, a special system broadcasting nothing but detailed weather information. This was important in remote areas where people might not be able to get TV or newspapers.

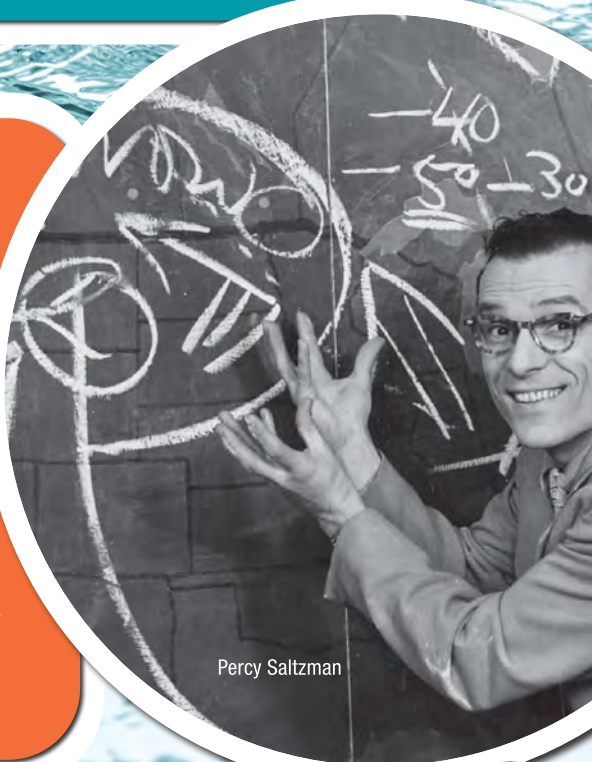


## RADIO SILENCE

During the Second World War, governments in Canada and the United States banned radio stations from talking about the weather in case enemy pilots were listening. Baseball announcers couldn't even say it was raining — they could only say the game was delayed.

In 1952, the first Canadian to appear on television in English Canada was — you guessed it! — a weather person, Percy Saltzman. Soon every TV station's newscasts had someone giving a weather forecast. As of 1988, Canadians could get their weather all day, every day on The Weather Network / MétéoMédia. Today, the weather website is the most popular of all federal government internet content.

Launched in 1994, it gets about 1.6 million visits a day. Today, many Canadians now use apps to get the weather no matter where they are.



Percy Saltzman