



Rivers in the sky – scientists shed light on predicting major rainfall events

Advances in recognising and predicting the behaviour of so-called “atmospheric rivers” are helping weather forecasters better recognise when, where and for how long major downpours will occur, according to visiting US research meteorologist Martin Ralph.

Ralph, from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), will give a free public lecture at the University of Victoria tomorrow (March 6). The event is co-hosted by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions, and the Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium.

Atmospheric rivers (AR's) are huge flows of water vapour approximately one kilometre off the ground that can carry as much water as 15 Mississippi Rivers. AR's are roughly 400 to 500 km across but thousands of kilometres long, and are the source of most floods on the Pacific west coast states – depositing, on average, one third to one half of the region's annual precipitation.

Ralph says many people are familiar with the so-called “pineapple express” heavy rain system from Hawaii, but he says that is just one type of AR.

“Volumes of big rainfall events are under-predicted by 50 percent, on average, on the US west coast. However increased data and model sharing between research scientists and weather forecasters is now helping to deliver more accurate precipitation guides six to seven days out.”

Ralph says water vapour and wind data from the NOAA's network of 100 new weather stations has been revealing patterns in AR characteristics and behaviour, resulting in more accurate AR forecasting. And he says this not only improves flood preparedness and public safety, but also water resource planning under a changing climate.

Media are welcome to attend the lecture. Advance interviews are available on request.

WHAT: Free public lecture by **Dr. Martin Ralph**, Branch Chief, Water Cycle Branch, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
WHEN: 3:00 – 4:00 p.m., Wednesday, March. 6, 2013
WHERE: [MacLaurin Building](#), Room D110, University of Victoria,

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