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New Group to Represent the Commercial Sector

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The relationships and roles among government and private service providers in the space weather working environment can often be difficult if clear communications pathways are not in place and if parties are not earnestly communicating with one another. With the current strong thrust in academia toward commercially exploiting research advances, the working environment becomes even more complex. Similar situations continue to exist in the realms of terrestrial weather forecasting and prediction, even given the maturity of this field compared to the relatively new space weather arena.

To foster collaborative working relationships among private, governmental, and academic sectors, the annual Space Weather Workshop, hosted by the NOAA Space Weather Prediction Center in Boulder, Colo., brings stakeholders together with the practical goals of learning advances in the field of space weather, networking, and discussing and working out knotty “territorial” issues.

The 2011 workshop continued its past successes in fostering communications and dialogue, and workshop organizers deserve commendation. As in previous years, a roundtable discussion on growing the space weather enterprise was organized by the Commercial Space Weather Interest Group. The keynote speaker for the roundtable, former NOAA administrator and now vice president for science at the CSC Corporation, Retired Vice Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, outlined global opportunities for growing the enterprise, both by commercial interests and by governments.

At the workshop, a key announcement was made regarding the commercial sector involved with providing space weather products and services. Five founding commercial providers have officially formed the American Commercial Space Weather Association, a formal organization that will represent private-sector commercial interests (<http://sw01.spaceweather.usu.edu/ACSWA/landing.html>). Additional members are being recruited. According to its Web site, the objectives of the association, currently led by a four-person executive committee, include providing space weather data and services to aid in mitigating risks to technology “that is vital to the country,” supplying advisory services related to space weather to government agencies, and representing commercial space weather capabilities nationally and internationally.

The establishment of a formal association for commercial space weather providers is a major, and very welcome, development—its existence will substantially increase the importance of space weather to critical national infrastructure issues. Further, it highlights commercial space weather activities as a growing industry that is integral to daily life, economic strength, national security, and academic advancement. The association can also play a key role in identifying important needs in data coverage that can be filled by private or government means. I'm confident that the new endeavor will be successful as it moves forward with its objectives and its representations of commercial interests.

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