PASCO COUNTY, FLORIDA

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Pasco County Receiving Improved Weather Information

Date: September 18, 2002
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Coastal flooding and high winds are major problems along the West Coast of Florida. Tropical storms, hurricanes, winter storms like the "Storm of the Century" on March 13, 1993, and squall lines hit frequently. For example, during the March 1993 no-name "Storm of the Century", residents of Pasco County experienced storm surge flooding of 6-9 feet along the coast in the early morning hours. 8,009 units received some level of damage. 2,266 homes received minor damage, 5,506 received major damage and storm surge flooding destroyed 237 homes.

In an effort to improve forecasts and warning time for residents of the West Central Coast of Florida, the University of South Florida's College of Marine Science (USF/CMS) approached the Florida State Legislature with the idea of establishing a real-time Coastal Ocean Monitoring Prediction System (COMPS) for the West Florida Shelf region. In 1997, COMPS was implemented as a legislative initiative with continuing support to date. Through the combined efforts of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as city and county governments, COMPS has steadily grown. Currently the COMPS program consists of an array of four (4) weather buoys offshore in the Gulf of Mexico and eight (8) shoreline coastal stations located from Shell Point south to Cape Sable.

Homasassa Springs, in Citrus County, and Tarpon Springs, in Pinellas, each received their shoreline COMPS tide stations through cooperative agreements with USF/CMS. Now Pasco County is participating with recently installed COMPS coastal tide stations in the towns of Aripeka and Port Richey, as well as a fully outfitted weather buoy offshore of Hudson. Funding for the weather buoy and the Aripeka coastal station came from a grant from the State of Florida's Emergency Management Preparedness and Assistance (EMPA) Trust Fund Competitive Grant Program, authored by USF/CMS COMPS Program Director Clifford R. Merz and Pasco County Emergency Management Director Michele Baker. The Port Richey coastal station was a cooperative effort between USF/CMS, the National Weather Service in Ruskin, Pasco County Emergency Management, and the City of Port Richey.

Testing of data has been underway since the stations were installed. The data is now available to all interests in the West Central Florida area through the COMPS web site. The COMPS overall program goal is to provide real-time data for emergency management use, and to improve description and understanding of the relevant physical processes that control shelf circulation, hydrography, and coastal flooding caused by storm surges. Data and model products are disseminated in real-time to federal, state, and local emergency management officials, as well as the general public, via the Internet (URL http://comps.marine.usf.edu). COMPS is one of the first systems of its kind, and is a compelling example of the practical value of inter-agency cooperation and university research.

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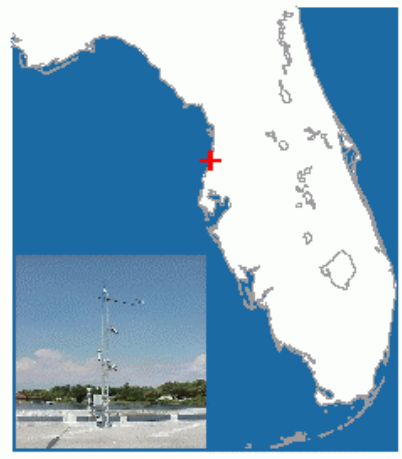
The COMPS Port Richey Coastal Station is located at 28° 17.108' N (28.285 N) and 82° 43.948' W (82.732 W) along the southwestern edge of Koons Road within the city of Port Richey's Brasher Park (Port Richey Recreation Center). The 4 pile structure, approximately 13' offshore in 6' of water, is approximately 7'x 9' with the platform deck height approximately 6' above the water's surface. Mounted on the decking is an instrument tower housing: Wind Speed/Direction, Relative Humidity/Air Temperature, Barometric Pressure, and Precipitation instrumentation. Data is transmitted hourly via satellite for inclusion into the COMPS web site as well as direct to the Pasco County Emergency Operations Center every 6 minutes via a dedicated RF communications link. This site became an operational on 4/10/2002.

The COMPS weather buoy is located at 28° 18.334' N (28.306 N), 83° 18.002' W (83.300 W) 28 miles offshore of Hudson in a water depth of 21 meters. The buoy consists of a surface float with a full suite of surface meteorological sensors (Wind Speed/Direction, Relative Humidity/Air Temperature, Barometric Pressure, Precipitation, Long and Short Wave Solar Radiation), and oceanographic sensors (in-water current/direction with depth and temperature/salinity measurements at three depths). Data from all sensors is gathered by a custom data logger/transmitter and transmitted hourly for inclusion in the COMPS web site. This site became an operational COMPS offshore buoy station on 4/24/2002.



The COMPS Aripeka Coastal Station is located at 28° 25.990' N' (28.433° N) and 82° 40.001' W (82.667 ' W) along the east side of the South Fork Hammock Creek Bridge in the city of Aripeka. Mounted on the bridge decking is an instrument tower housing: Wind Speed/Direction, Relative Humidity/Air Temperature, Barometric Pressure, and Precipitation sensors. Marine instrumentation includes Water Level, Temperature, and Salinity. Data is transmitted hourly via satellite for inclusion in the COMPS web site. This site became an operational COMPS coastal station on 6/12/2002.

For more information please contact:

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