

Some Perils of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Weather

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Although do-it-yourself (DIY) weather can be tempting for attorneys because it is quick and inexpensive to obtain, the information obtained from DIY weather can be highly misleading. One source of DIY weather is from the www.timeanddate.com (TAD) website. I have worked on two recent personal injury cases where opposing counsel obtained historical weather information from the TAD website. In both cases, the attorneys thought they had weather information for a smaller community where the slip and fall occurred. However, the actual weather information was from locations 35 to 55 miles away from the two sites where the slip and falls occurred. This was critical to the outcome of the cases. Specifically, the weather information from these distant weather stations (35 to 55 miles away) made it appear the weather was different at the sites compared to that of much closer, representative weather stations that I uncovered during my investigations (i.e., within 0.5 to 2 miles of the sites).

How can this be? Apparently, the TAD website has an algorithm that searches for the closest official FAA/NWS recording station to the location that is being sought. When that station is found, the TAD website will list the weather data as if it were from the actual location that was entered in the search. Even so, the location of the actual official reporting station will be listed in small/fine print embedded near the top of the first page, so it is quite easy to miss. However, as a certified consulting meteorologist, it has been straightforward for me to demonstrate that this distant weather information is unrepresentative of the location of the slip and fall. Moreover, all weather stations have metadata (i.e., data about data) that should list the station latitude, longitude, and elevation. The TAD website does not provide this information, and therefore can be easily subjected to mischaracterization.

Here is an example. As a meteorologist who has lived in western South Dakota since 1988, I know that Hoover is a rather small unincorporated community in Butte County. I also know there is no official hourly reporting weather station there. Nevertheless, if I go to the TAD website and request historical data for August 2013 for Hoover, it will immediately render it for me (Fig. 1). The bold header near the top of the page exclaims “**August 2013 Weather in Hoover — Graph**” and farther down (not shown in Fig. 1) the page states “**Hoover Weather History for August 1, 2013.**” Note, however, that near the top of Fig. 1 in small print it states: “Weather station: Ellsworth Air Force Base, USA.” The Ellsworth Air Force Base weather station is **67 miles south** of Hoover! That is not what you expected, was it?

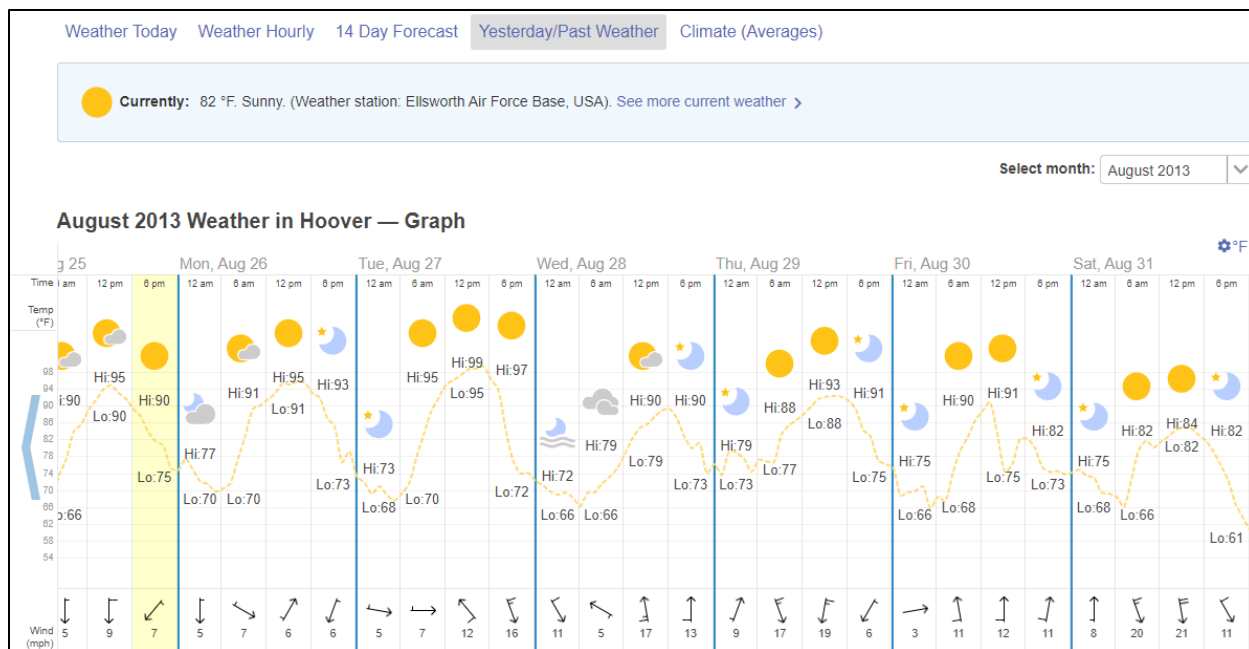


Figure 1. Hoover, SD, weather graph based on a search for August 2013 from the TAD website (<https://www.timeanddate.com/weather/@5765694/historic?month=8&year=2013>).

The takeaway from this experience for me is two-fold. **First**, if you are an attorney who relies on weather information from the TAD website, be extremely cautious about its authenticity. You could easily be misled into believing the weather is for your site of interest, but in reality, it is for a location many tens of miles away from the actual site. **Second**, if you are an attorney who is presented with weather information by opposing counsel who used the TAD website to obtain it, be very, very skeptical in accepting that information. Again, it is highly likely the weather information is not for the site it is claimed to be.

In summary, there may be times when non-meteorologists can get away with DIY weather, but using the TAD website generally is not one of those circumstances. Cases like these are when the role of a certified consulting meteorologist becomes especially important in order to provide accurate and reliable weather information. Note that some DIY sources may be useful for a broad, general understanding of weather conditions across a large area. However, when accurate and precise weather information for a specific site is required, all DIY weather sources will independently fall short of a professional meteorologist's expertise.