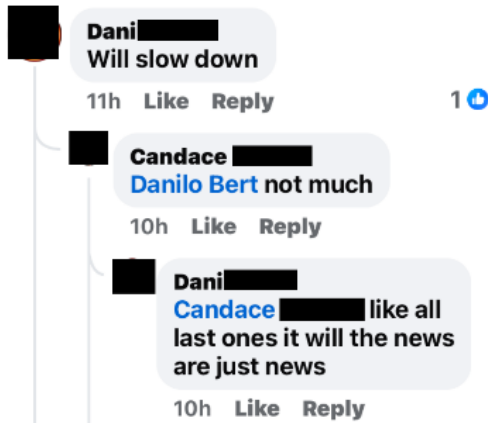


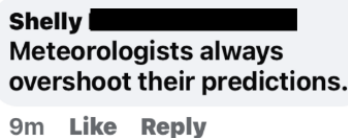
Short Term Disaster Memory Loss

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Hurricane Helene hit our country last month with a death toll over 220, according to the Associated Press, and hundreds of people still not accounted for. Similar to what we saw during Hurricane Katrina, many people chose not to evacuate during Hurricane Helene. I watched social media the days before landfall trying to see what people were saying about why they chose not to leave. It frustrated me when I saw comments like these.



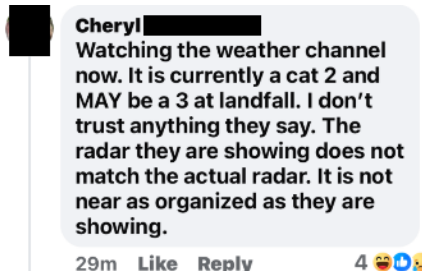
"It will slow down... like all last ones it will the news are just news."



"Meteorologists always overshoot their predictions."



"They all wobble I don't know why you guys always hype everything up to put people in a panic."



"Watching the weather channel now. It is currently a cat 2 and MAY be a 3 at landfall. I don't trust anything they say."

"It's not going to be another Katrina."

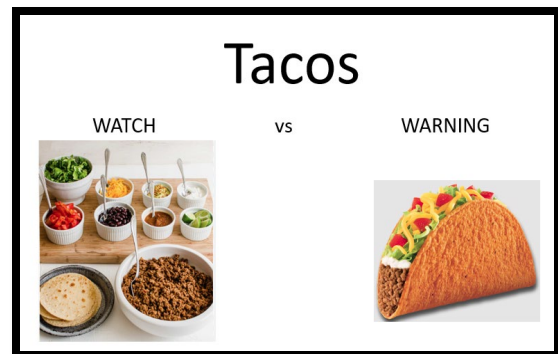


In great contrast to Katrina and Helene, people evacuated in huge numbers before Hurricane Milton hit land. This clearly demonstrates that people act when they understand the present danger. However, their memories are short. In fact, I say people have shown this same pattern of short term disaster memory loss for as long as we can all remember. All kidding aside, memory blanks are a regular part of our brain's defense for protecting us from the continued impact of traumatic events. Over time, we may lose a large sense of what a disaster event was like.

So, as we plan for winter blizzards and severe weather in our region, short term disaster memory loss should be taken into account. Generally, we only talk about severe weather during severe weather awareness week in April. People need to be reminded of why it's important to take action when severe weather warnings are issued year round, especially in the winter.

Here are a few best practices for weather awareness and promoting good response.

- 1) Have fun with your messages to the college community about things such as weather "watches" versus "warnings". Making the message less traumatic and more memorable often helps people remember your message best.
- 2) Encourage and include all areas of the college to participate in weather drills, as well as evaluations that include student government, disability services, veteran services, and all who will take part in the drill. Creating a feeling of community and participating during drills leads to better responses.
- 3) Ensure college communications match community communications on weather events. Reporting good and accurate information goes a long way toward trusting the people at the college.



Remember, it's never too early to plan for winter weather! Just like Santa, we need to check our lists twice and get at least one tabletop in before the snowflakes fly. Happy planning!