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New Web site to pool European information on dangerous weather

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VIENNA, Austria (AP) It looks like a color-coded terror alert scale and meteorologically speaking, that's exactly what it is.

With climate change making conditions more unpredictable, national weather services from across the European continent are joining forces to create a new Web site providing up-to-the-minute information on "extreme weather" across Europe.

The initiative, managed by Austria's Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics, is designed to give users advance warning of floods, severe thunderstorms, gale-force winds, heat waves, blizzards and other violent weather that poses a danger to life and property.

It also issues 24- and 48-hour warnings for heavy fog, extreme cold, forest fires and "coastal events" such as tsunamis.

"In one glance you will be able to see where in Europe the weather might become dangerous," organizers said.

The service is similar to the United States' National Weather Service, which posts on its Web site conditions and forecasts for various regions.

Although the European site officially will launch in Madrid, Spain, on March 23 World Meteorological Day it is expected to be available in other languages.

Under the new pan-European warning system, white means missing or insufficient data; green means no immediate danger; orange warns of dangerous conditions; and red means very dangerous, "exceptionally so."

Pictograms and photographs showing lightning bolts, churning floodwaters and other catastrophic scenes alert users "consciously or aware" of a particular threat, the organizers said.

Users click on maps to get details on current conditions or forecasts of violent weather for the next day. The service is available in German, English and French.

The Network of European Meteorological Services includes 20 countries and covers land stretching from Portugal to Poland. It is contributing, but the site hopes to bring others online eventually.

The Web site "pulls together all the warnings from the official national weather services," said Michael Steiner, director of the Vienna office.

It seemed to be accurate on Saturday, at least for Vienna, which was buffeted by gale-force winds gusting to 50 mph. The site issued a high-wind warning for the area and provided details in German and English.

On the Net:

www.meteoalarm.eu

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