

New Twitter rules restrict US weather service, raising safety fears

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Twitter's new volume limits on viewing posts suddenly left several National Weather Service (NWS) offices across the US unable to receive tweets from storm spotters who help with tracking extreme weather, including during storms this week – prompting safety warnings. NWS Boulder in Colorado announced on 4 July that due to Twitter's limits, implemented as part of Elon Musk's abrupt changes to the platform's usability late last month, "we are unable to access most tweets at this time. Send reports to our other social media accounts or direct through our email/phone lines." The story was first reported by the Denver Post. "If you are a storm spotter, head to weather.gov/bou/spotters for additional info," the office said, adding shortly afterwards: "While we have found some workarounds to view specific tweets, we are not able to efficiently sift through this during active severe weather events. Thank you for your understanding. Automated watches and warnings will still disseminate as normal, but no other tweets are planned." The NWS office in Wakefield, Virginia, announced similar impacts, local media reported, saying: "Due to new limits on the number of tweets an account can view per day, we may be unable to see tweeted reports of severe weather and associated damage. Please contact our office directly at 757-899-2415 with any reports." The Wilmington, North Carolina, office tweeted the same message and directed users to submit their severe weather alerts to a Google Form instead. In response to a user saying, "Someone said if you access twitter through their website instead of the app that the limits don't apply. I'm assuming it's worth a try," the Wakefield office replied: "Unfortunately, it doesn't matter on our end. We still have significant problems using Twitter on both a mobile device and a PC." Musk imposed a viewing limit on the majority of users who use the service, restricting unverified accounts to viewing 600 tweets a day. A day later, the limit increased to 1,000. In a statement to the Guardian on Thursday, the national office of the NWS said: "Twitter's new post-viewing limits serve as a reminder for people to have multiple ways of receiving weather information and alerts. Our use of Twitter is impacted by the new changes. However, Twitter is supplemental to other ways we receive storm reports and disseminate watches and warnings, not an official channel." The tweets by NWS offices triggered backlash against Musk and Twitter, the platform he took ownership of last year, with some saying the change was potentially life-threatening. "This is dangerous, @elonmusk. Thousands of people in Colorado depend on information from the National Weather Service in times of severe weather (as is currently happening) to stay safe. There must be another way to fix whatever you deemed to be wrong at Twitter," one TV news producer in Denver wrote. An Appalachian user wrote: "As a storm chaser I have communicated with federal agencies as well as news companies in both the US and Canada through the years, and Twitter is by far the easiest way to do this. Twitter is a major tool in helping warn the public of dangerous weather conditions and a collapse or severe degradation of the website is going to ultimately end up with

somebody being killed.”