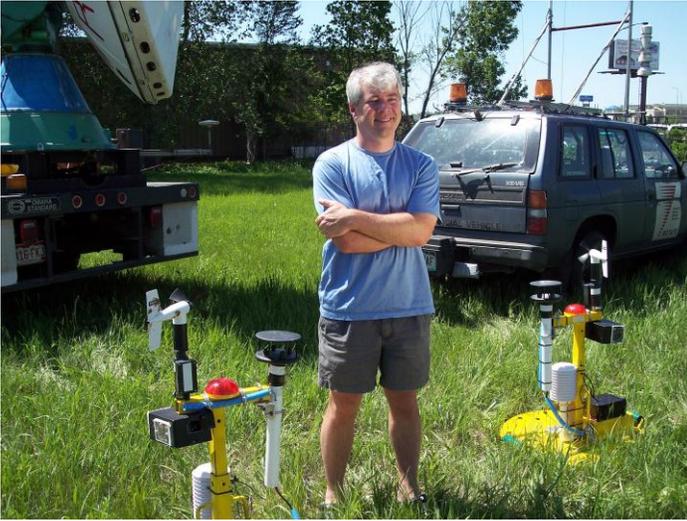


TORNADO ALLEY

JOSH WURMAN



Josh Wurman is the president and founder of the Center for Severe Weather Research in Boulder, Colorado. He also serves as a chief scientist and coordinator of the VORTEX2 project, operating three of the project's Doppler on Wheels vehicles, the fast-scanning radar trucks featured in *Tornado Alley*, which he invented in the mid-nineties.

Wurman appears regularly in the Discovery Channel's *Storm Chasers* series. He was also featured in National Geographic's *Tornado Intercept* and *The True Face of Hurricanes*, as well as in the IMAX film *Forces of Nature*. He has appeared in several other documentaries and television shows, including those on PBS, NHK, the

History Channel, and the Weather Channel.

In the early nineties, frustrated by the instruments then being used to study severe weather, Wurman began to conceive of radar he could "modernize, toughen up, and get up onto a truck platform." Short on funds, his first DOW vehicle, he says, was made of "a U-Haul full of a junk," cast-off parts that the National Center for Atmospheric Research, where he was then working, had left out in a field to rust. Using a borrowed truck and a surplus antenna pedestal from World War Two, he "duct-taped and bolted" the DOW together. (It was a project that was similar in spirit, he says, to Sean Casey's TIV2).

Today, Wurman's fleet of radar trucks is the backbone of the VORTEX2 project. They're equipped with state-of-the-art computers that require constant monitoring. So much so that Wurman, a severe weather researcher who has gotten right up next to at least a hundred and seventy tornadoes over the course of his career, has physically only laid eyes on maybe twenty of them. "Right at the moment that would be most interesting to look out the window is the busiest time inside the truck," he says. "I did it once. I got out. I looked at the tornado for a minute. When I hopped back in I saw that the computer had crashed. And so I don't do that anymore, unless somebody is in there watching the computer. We're not out there to look at the tornadoes. We're out there to get data."

In addition to creating the DOW mobile radars, Wurman also invented bistatic radar networks, and he owns nine patents related to this and other DOW technology. He received both his undergraduate and doctorate degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has worked as a scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research and was a tenured faculty member at the University of Oklahoma, where he taught and did research for close to a decade. In 1998, Wurman founded the Center For Severe Weather Research, which he runs with his wife, Ling. They have four children, who, so far, Wurman says, "show no unhealthy obsessive interests in tornadoes, hurricanes, or radars."