



20 years of ESSL – monthly jubilee topic

As part of the celebrations of **20 years of ESSL**, we are publishing a series of monthly jubilee topics highlighting different aspects of our work and community. Each month, we briefly revisit a historical high-impact event featured as the “topic of the month” in the ESSL calendar. This time, we focus on the **heavy rain event in Heidesheim (Rheinland-Pfalz) in 1876**.

Heavy rain in Heidesheim (Rheinland-Pfalz), Germany

On Sunday, **2 April 1876**, a **flash flood hit Heidesheim** (Rheinland-Pfalz) and **killed eight people**. The day had begun warm and clear. By mid-afternoon, storm clouds were building over the Taunus hills across the river, and shortly after 4:30 p.m. hail began to fall. These details come from a firsthand account by Nikolaus Haupt, a nine-year-old Heidesheim resident at the time, published fifty years later in the village fire brigade’s anniversary pamphlet (Haupt, eyewitness account, in: Jubiläumsschrift der Freiwilligen Feuerwehr Heidesheim, 1926).





Source: Historischer Verein Ingelheim

The **Rhein Hessischer Beobachter** of 5 April 1876 described the event plainly: *“With lightning, thunder and hail, a cloudburst descended whose water masses flooded the village several feet deep in an instant.”* Within hours, torrential runoff poured off the Mainzer Berg plateau, the highest ground in the area, and into the village. The Mühlbach, a stream through the centre of Heidesheim, turned into a torrent within minutes ([Geißler, ingelheimergeschichte.de](http://Geißler.ingelheimergeschichte.de)). Around twenty houses were destroyed, mostly in the village centre. Eight people died, some trapped inside their own homes as the walls gave way. A tragic fate befell the Weidmann family, the family of the village’s level crossing keeper. Mrs. Weidmann and her three children lost their lives. The newspaper reported that seven bodies had been recovered and laid out in the town-hall chamber; the eighth was still missing (Rhein Hessischer Beobachter, 5 April 1876). All eight are buried in a communal grave in Heidesheim cemetery. Nine months later, on 26 December 1876, four citizens founded the village’s first Volunteer Fire Brigade, a direct consequence of that afternoon (Feuerwehr Heidesheim chronicle).



Reporter: Thilo Kühne (ESWD management/ESSL Tea...
Violent flash floods caused by severe rainfall; Eight
people killed;

Number of Fatalities

8 



Location of the 1876 Heidesheim heavy rain event in Germany (blue circle; source: ESWD).

The ESSL Testbed – what our participants say about it

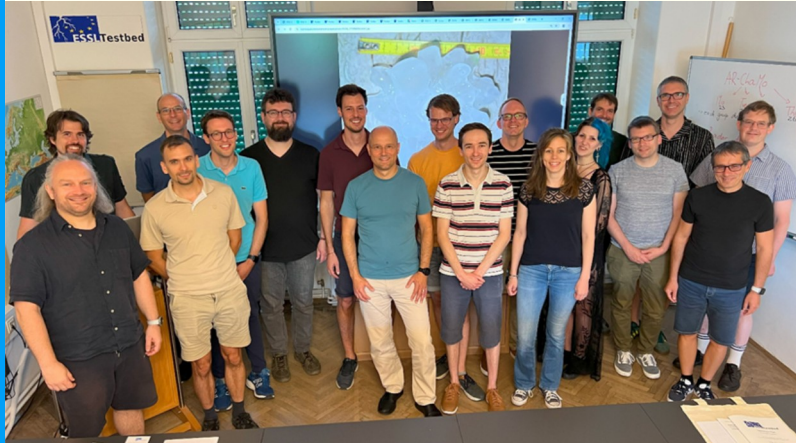
For this month's jubilee topic, we reflect on what participant feedback has shown about the ESSL Testbed over the years.

We have been collecting feedback from our participants at the end of every Testbed week since the very beginning in 2012. The feedback form allows participants to rate the activity, comment on what they liked and disliked, and provide suggestions.

Typically, participants appreciate forecast discussions and a lively and relaxed atmosphere. What is also appreciated is a real-time weather approach, where the outcome of many activities is not known. This means that in some cases, trainers themselves are left wondering about the behavior of the atmosphere, and this common struggle is even comforting. We take recommendations seriously and have implemented many of those to improve the level of the activities.

ESSL weather data displayer has also been improved substantially based on participant feedback, including its most valued sounding and hodograph tool. Our effort to improve shows in the average scores, which have increased since 2012! At the ESSL-EUMETSAT Testbeds, we take the feedback one step further and send a form four to seven months after the activity to see whether the activity was useful to the participants. In 2025, all survey responses indicated that the activity was worthwhile or very useful. 93% of participants stated that the Testbed had changed the way they forecast or nowcast severe convective storms.

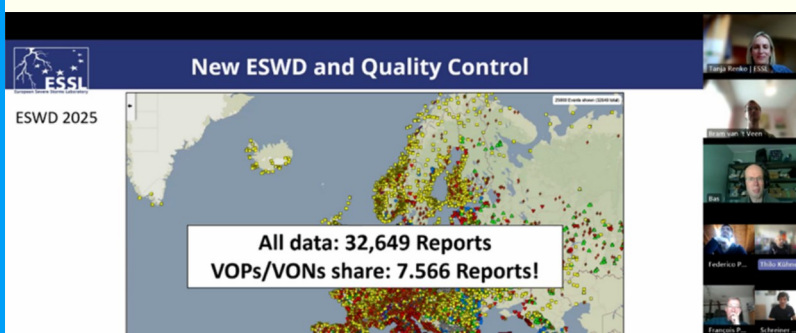
It is interesting how different forecasters take home different concepts: some appreciate an ingredients-based approach, others all the nuances of individual hazard forecasting, and some the nowcasting aspects of using the satellite data in combination with lightning and radar to nowcast the initiation and storm severity.



Participants of expert Testbed in 2025

ESWD workshop with Voluntary Observer Persons and Voluntary Observer Networks

On **9 April 2026**, ESSL held an online workshop for its **Voluntary Observer Persons (VOPs)** and **Voluntary Observer Networks (VONs)**. These meetings are very important for staying closely connected with the volunteer observers and networks whose contribution to the [ESWD](#) is substantial. This edition was particularly valuable following the ESWD upgrade in late summer 2025, as it provided an opportunity to present recent changes in the database, share updated reporting guidance, and discuss topics such as the [IF scale](#) and why consistency in reporting is important. The ESWD is supported by a broad [network of contributors and cooperation partners](#) across Europe.



HAILCHANGE Project Kick-off

In September 2025, **ESSL** started a collaboration with the [Austrian Institute of Technology](#) on modelling hail risk. Prompted by the surge in extreme and damaging hailstorms during recent years, these hazards have also recognized in regulations such as the EU Taxonomy for climate risks and the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). The **HAILCHANGE** project addresses this by **combining high-resolution climate models (ICON, WRF) with ESSL's statistical approaches to improve hail probability forecasts**. The outcome are detailed hail hazard maps for Austria and the Alpine region, covering both past events and future scenarios under different global warming levels. In March, the kick-off workshop of the project took place at ESSL in Wiener Neustadt.



Participants of the kick-off workshop in Wiener Neustadt and online

ESSL training calendar and Testbed 2026

| Date | Activity |
|----------------|--|
| 4 – 8 May 2026 | ESSL-EUMETSAT Forecaster Testbed (MTG focus) |

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|-------------------------------|---|
| 18 – 22 May 2026 | ESSL-EUMETSAT Forecaster Testbed (MTG focus) |
| 1 – 2 June 2026 | NEW 2-day ONLINE refresher on forecasting severe convection (qualification: at least one prior ESSL course or testbed week) |
| 15 – 19 June 2026 | ESSL Testbed 2026 – regular week (focus on radar and NWP) |
| 22 – 26 June 2026 | ESSL Testbed 2026 – expert week (on invitation only) |
| 7 – 11 September 2026 | EMS Annual Meeting (co-sponsored by ESSL) |
| 14 – 18 September 2026 | ESSL-EUMETSAT Forecaster Testbed (MTG focus) |
| 28 September 2026 | 20th Anniversary of the ESSL – jubilee event |
| 29 September – 1 October 2026 | IF Scale and wind damage assessment workshop |
| 5 – 9 October 2026 | ESSL-EUMETSAT Forecaster Testbed (MTG focus) |
| February or March 2027 | 2nd edition of new radar course – pre-announcement: Optimal use of radar data in severe storm nowcasting |

You can find details about all events and registration at

<https://www.events.essl.org/>.

Unsure which course to attend? [Try our online quiz!](#)

For further information about registration, please contact us via email at events@essl.org.

Or contact us for [tailored training or forecaster training on the job](#).



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