

## Where to Find It

Most forms of weather information are available over the Internet. However, some of them can also be accessed via other means, as indicated in the table below.

	Internet	VHF	HF	Phone	Dedicated
Buoy data	X			X	
Computer-generated weather models	X				
Marine weather maps	X		X		X
Non-U.S. weather	X				
Ocean currents	X				
Radar	X				
Real-time observations and local conditions	X			X	
Satellite images	X		X		X
Scatterometer data	X				
Text forecasts (also available via VHF or HF radio)	X	X	X		X
Tides and currents	X				
Weather calculators and Bowditch online	X				

### You've Got Mail

If you have access to e-mail onboard, you can use it to receive weather maps and GRIB files. (As you probably know, GRIB — GRIdded Binary — is a mathematically concise data format commonly used in meteorology to store historical and forecasted weather data.) Stan Honey and Jim Corenman have made the process easier through their Saildocs service. For example, to receive a GRIB forecast file containing a week's worth of computer-generated weather data (wind speed, direction and barometric pressure), just type a message of the following format at the top of an e-mail: send gfs:30 N,30S,10W,80W|2,2|00,12,24,36,48,60,72,96,120,144,168.

Address the request to query@saildocs.com, and almost immediately the information will be returned to the e-mail address from which the request originated. Nothing is required in the subject line, although I often put a description of what it is that I am requesting so I can refer to the information later when I am searching through my IN box.

The geographic boundaries of the search can be changed to suit the route(s) you're planning. In the above sample request, the information called for lies within the boundaries of 30 degrees North to 30 degrees South and from 10 degrees West Longitude to 80 degrees West. The data will appear in a 2-degree by 2-degree grid on most (if not all) GRIB-display software.

If a smaller file size is more desirable, either the geographic area or the number of hours requested can be

reduced. Alternatively, if you would like to see the coverage in a larger area like, say, the Mediterranean Sea, the location parameters can be changed accordingly.

To subscribe to weather maps transmitted by e-mail, use the following format. Note that you need to insert the correct identifying letters for the particular map you wish to receive, list the time of day when you want to receive the map and specify how frequently you need to access the updated maps. Address the request for the map to query@saildocs.com. The only thing in the text of the message is: sub http://weather.noaa.gov/pub/fax/QDTM86.TIF days=7 time=20:55 interval=24. It is addressed to query@saildocs.com NOT to the http URL address in the text of the message.

The above sample message will retrieve a 48-hour surface-pressure forecast that is valid at 12 Z (noon) for the entire North Atlantic Ocean. The map will be sent to you automatically every 24 hours for 7 days, and it will be in your mailbox at 2055 UTC. If you want a longer forecast, use the following format: sub http://weather.noaa.gov/pub/fax/PWAM99.TIF days=7 time=21:00 interval=24. This yields a 96-hour surface-pressure forecast that is valid at 12Z for the entire North Atlantic Ocean. Like the previous example, the report will be sent automatically every 24 hours for 7 days, but this one will be in your mailbox at 2100 UTC. Generally, the identifying letters for many of the specific maps you might be interested in can be found at <http://weather.noaa.gov/pub/fax/rfaxatl.txt> for the Atlantic or at <http://weather.noaa.gov/pub/fax/rfaxpac.txt> for the Pacific Ocean.

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Again, if you're intimidated by identifying, evaluating and collating the weather information you'll need on an extended coastal cruise or long offshore passage, a number of private sources (such as the weather-routing companies listed on page 26) can help. For a fee, they will cater to your specific needs, providing you with suggestions on which way to head while you're underway or letting you know when the weather looks suitable for your departure.

Such services can provide cruisers with a wide range of weather-related services, but the best ones will clearly demonstrate that they are as interested in you and your situation as you are in the weather information that they can provide. If they don't, it's unlikely that they will furnish you with the most suitable solutions to your specific weather-related challenges.

**Author's Note:** Weather URLs are notoriously susceptible to updates and changes. For updates on the web addresses listed in this article, visit the my website (listed below) or email [billbie-wenga@cox.net](mailto:billbie-wenga@cox.net).

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While accumulating well over 350,000 sea miles aboard some of the world's cutting-edge racing boats, Bill Biewenga has also been at the forefront of weather routing, navigating and helping others achieve their racing and cruising goals. Based in Newport, Rhode Island, he provides mariners with weather-related information via the website [www.wxadvantage.com](http://www.wxadvantage.com).