An example showing the importance of timely weather observations taken by Voluntary Observing Ships

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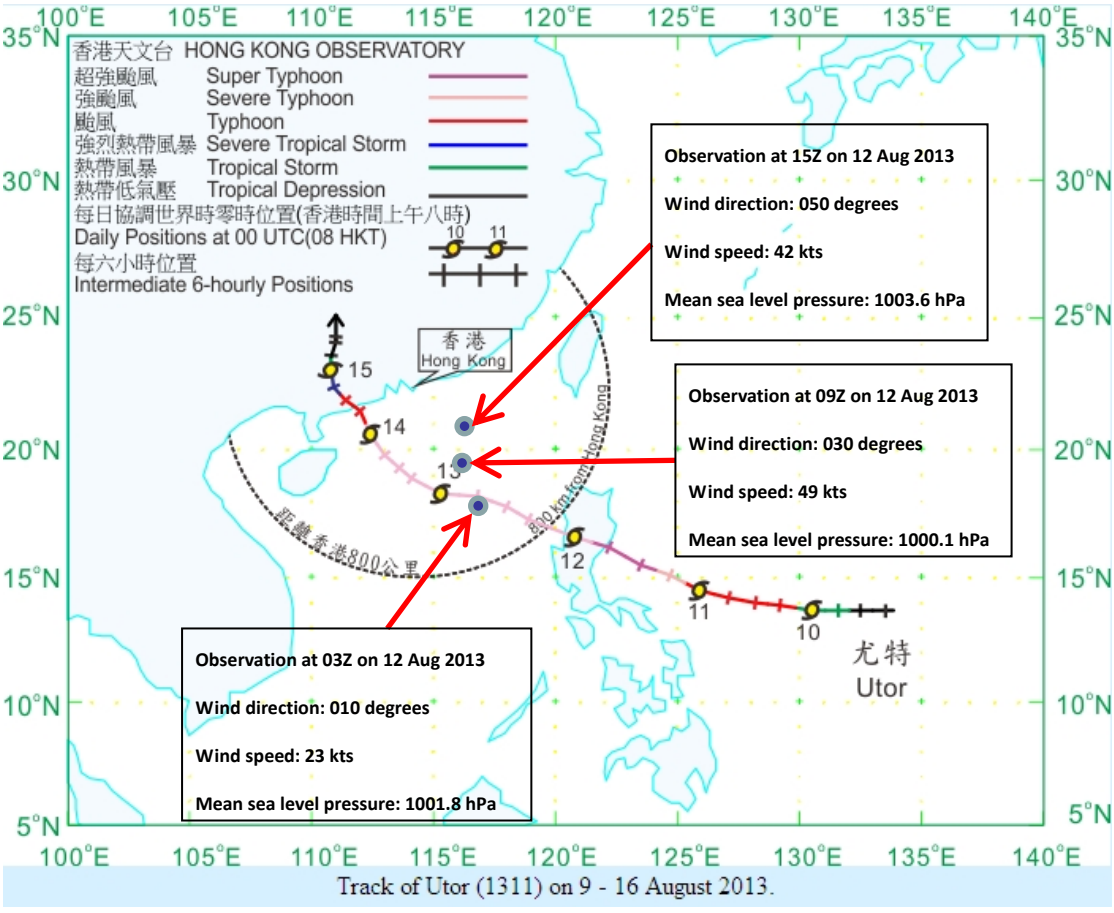
A ship weather observation, including message preparation and transmission, normally takes around 10 - 15 minutes to complete. Electronic logbooks installed on board help facilitate transmission of the weather observations to downstream users in a timely manner, in particular for issuance of marine forecasts and warnings.

Super typhoon Utor was the first tropical cyclone necessitating the issuance of No. 8 Gale or Storm Signal in 2013 in Hong Kong. In the morning on 12 August, Utor crossed Luzon and entered the South China Sea where weather observations are rare. While Utor was taking a northwesterly track over the northern part of the South China Sea to the south of Hong Kong (Figure below), weather forecasters were looking for as many surface weather observations as possible in the sea to help them assess the prevailing situation.



Track of Utor (1311) on 9 - 16 August 2013.

At the right time, a Hong Kong Voluntary Observing Ship (VOS) travelled just to the west of Utor from south to north across the northern part of the South China Sea and provided vital weather observations at 03UTC, 09UTC and 15UTC (Blue dots in the figure) on 12 August in a timely manner using the electronic logbook installed on board. The timely observations on surface pressure, wind speed and wind direction provided by the VOS were very useful for estimating the intensity (including the strong/gale winds radius) and determining the centre of Utor.