



Outdoor Warning Sirens Briefing July 2013

Safeguard Iowa Partnership recently surveyed the partners to gather feedback on emergency plans in response to the outdoor warning sirens. Many stated they were unsure of the official recommended protocol in response to an activation of an outdoor siren due to the recent policy changes. In addition, many respondents were unclear of the reasoning behind the policy change for the activation of the outdoor warning sirens. This briefing will discuss the purpose of the new outdoor warning siren activation policy and recommended response procedures.

Research conducted by the Storm Prediction Center indicates that an EF0 tornado, which is the most commonly occurring tornado, pack wind speeds of 65-85 mph. These wind speeds have been known to peel the surface off some roofs, break branches from trees, damage gutters and siding, push over shallow-rooted trees and turn unsecured items into dangerous projectiles. The potential for serious injury to unsheltered persons when 70 mph winds occur are comparable to that of an EF0 tornado. Because of the potential danger from high wind speeds, it was decided that the policy for the activation of the outdoor warning sirens be expanded to include events where forecasted or actual wind speeds reach or exceed 70 mph. Since the policy change, there is still confusion regarding the activation of the outdoor warning siren for forecasted high winds.

Outdoor warning sirens were designed to work in concert with other information systems, such as television, radio, Internet, or the National Weather Service's weather alert radios. When the outdoor warning sirens are activated, whether for a tornado or for high-speed winds, the intended action is to take shelter first, and seek additional information to ensure the appropriate safety measures are taken. If there is no tornado and the outdoor warning sirens were activated for high wind speeds, it is still important to remind all employees that the greatest danger is outdoors and that they should immediately move indoors.

The outdoor warning siren policy is county specific and not all 99 counties in Iowa have adopted the new outdoor warning siren policy for high-speed wind.

