

Outdoor Warning Siren Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What do the guidelines say?

Under the revised Story County outdoor warning system guidelines, sirens may be sounded for:

- Tornadoes
- Severe Thunderstorms with winds occurring/forecast to be 70 mph or greater or hail 1.75 inches (golf ball) or greater

The sirens may be sounded multiple times during the threat. There will be no “all clear” signal for the sirens.

2. What should I do when I hear the sirens?

Go inside to the lowest level and most-interior room of the structure. Put as many walls as possible between you and the outside. Do not call 911 to ask why the sirens have been activated, seek shelter and tune to NOAA All-Hazards Radio or local media for more detailed information on the storm’s location, timing, and intensity.

3. Why are these guidelines important?

People who are outside are most vulnerable to injury or death due to severe weather because they have less access to weather warnings through NOAA weather radios or media outlets. These guidelines are designed to increase the amount of time individuals have to seek shelter and get information on approaching severe weather if they are outside. The strong winds and thunderstorms associated with the multi-state severe storm system that hit the East Coast in 2012, resulted in 28 deaths which demonstrate the risk that can be associated with storms that are not tornadoes.

4. Why can’t I hear the sirens in my house?

Outdoor warning systems are not designed to warn people indoors at home or at work of weather threats. They are only designed to alert those who are outside that something dangerous is approaching

5. Why don’t the outdoor warning sirens sound an all-clear signal?

People should be indoors and monitoring local media or NOAA All-Hazards Radio for updates on the storm.

6. How much more often can I expect the sirens to sound for severe weather?

Historical information indicates that over the last four years, this guidance would have increased the number of times sirens would have been activated somewhere in Story County approximately three (3) additional times each year.

7. How were the guidelines developed?

Discussion on this issue began after straight line winds created damage and hazardous situations for people outside. Under previous guidelines, use of outdoor warning sirens to alert people who were outside to approaching hazardous winds and hail was not authorized. Story County Emergency Management evaluated the type and level of damage associated with previous severe wind storms and the frequency of their occurrence to develop draft guidelines that would help protect citizens outdoors from the dangers associated with high winds or hail, while not increasing false activation of the sirens to a level

to make their use ineffective. The draft guidelines were discussed at the Emergency Management Commission meeting, the E911 board meeting and the guidance was provided to mayors and the Story County Board of Supervisors to allow them to gather inputs from their staff and citizens. Inputs from the different organizations were incorporated into the final draft of the guidelines which were approved by the Story County Emergency Management Commission on Oct 17, 2012.

8. Will the sirens warn me of every dangerous storm?

While the National Weather Service has greatly enhanced their ability to identify dangerous storms and provide advanced warning, there are still storms that rapidly build to dangerous levels providing little or no warning time. Additionally, lightning is a threat associated with most summertime storms, regardless of whether sirens are activated or not. The safest approach is to be proactive and use all of the information available to protect yourself and your family from threatening weather. Nothing can replace common sense. Sirens are only one part of a warning system that includes preparation, NOAA All-Hazards Radio, and the local media.

9. Where can I read the guidelines?

The outdoor warning siren guidance document and other information are available on the Story County Emergency Management Agency web site at: <http://www.storycountyiowa.gov/index.aspx?nid=513> .

10. Who activates the sirens?

Sirens are typically activated by the 911 communications centers using information provided by the National Weather Service, local first responders, and Story County Emergency Management. Designated local first responders and city officials can also request activation of the sirens for their communities.

11. How can I get more information on severe weather?

Story County Emergency Management website: <http://www.storycountyiowa.gov/ema>
NOAA All-Hazards Radio: www.weather.gov/nwr