



Outdoor Warning Siren Guide

Cowley County, Kansas

Cowley County Emergency Management

1/3/2022

The purpose of this guide is to establish common guidelines for activation of outdoor warning sirens throughout Cowley County. Special Note: This guide is for all sirens in the County except for those in Arkansas City and Bolton Township (IXL). Those sirens are owned and activated by the City of Arkansas City and are addressed separately in this guide.

The outdoor warning sirens represent only one part of a broader public emergency notification system. Other components might include NOAA All-Hazards Weather Radio, law enforcement, text notification networks, social media and the broadcast media. Sirens are used to alert citizens who are outdoors of an imminent hazard and prompt them to go indoors, seek further information and ultimately seek shelter.

This document is not intended to relieve, replace, or supersede any authority or responsibility local jurisdictions might have to protect the citizens of their community.

Purpose

Confusion hinders public response. Using common guidelines for the outdoor warning sirens throughout the various jurisdictions in Cowley County will minimize confusion in emergency situations. Establishing common guidelines will also enable communities to partner in an area-wide public education campaign regarding sirens and the overall public emergency notification system.

These guidelines are based on communication technology and systems available in Cowley County, and also on the current science of severe weather warnings.

Siren Activation for Imminent Threats

Upon hearing outdoor warning sirens, it is important that all persons immediately refer to local broadcast media (radio, TV, etc.) or NOAA Weather Radio for additional information!

When activated, the tone will sound for 3 minutes, re-sounding for the duration of the threat (every 10-15 minutes is recommended). Repeated sounding of sirens has directly resulted in saved lives in numerous cases. Doing repeated sirens allows for an increased chance the sirens will be heard and lets people know the threat still exists.

Severe Weather

National Weather Service warnings define the area threatened by the storm and include information about the history and/or potential impact of the specific storm. In addition, trained spotters provide real-time reports of an imminent threat approaching or occurring in the community. When a warning includes the specific hazards defined below or when trained spotters report any of these hazards, sirens will be activated for all jurisdictions in the threatened area.

Tornadoes – Activation for:

- Tornado Warning issued by the National Weather Service (any community that has sirens shall have theirs activated if that community is located within the warning polygon or if their community is listed in the "locations impacted" portion of the warning);
- Tornado or funnel cloud reported by a trained spotter (sirens are activated for communities in the anticipated path of the storm even before a warning can be issued);
- At the request of a law enforcement officer, fire officer or city official

*** If a community is located outside of the warning polygon or not listed as a location to be impacted, the activation of the sirens shall be at the discretion of the EM staff member during the event.

Severe Thunderstorms – Activation for:

Severe Thunderstorm Warning issued by the National Weather Service with a confirmed report from a trained spotter that includes:

- Wind 70 mph or greater approaching the Winfield City Lake
or
- At the request of a law enforcement officer, fire officer or city official

Activation of Outdoor Warning Sirens

Activation of the sirens can be done by any Emergency Management staff or trained Emergency Auxiliary member. Sirens can only be activated on one of the two consoles in the Communications Room (currently located at station 5 and station 7) or by the Cowley County Emergency Communications Department (Dispatch).

The step by step procedure will not be covered in this guide. For graphical version of these steps, please refer to Appendix B: Outdoor Warning Siren Activation.

As noted earlier, the City of Arkansas City is responsible for the activation of the sirens in Arkansas City and Bolton Township (IXL). Officials from the City of Arkansas City will determine when those sirens are to be sounded. However, if a failure were to occur with their system, or at their request, the Cowley County EOC has the capabilities to activate their warnings. The specific procedures to activate those sirens are also located in Appendix B.

Additional considerations:

Although other weather factors pose a risk, community-wide outdoor warning sirens will NOT be sounded for lightning or flash floods. By its nature, lightning is “self-alerting” and citizens should go indoors when thunder is heard. Also, because of the frequency of lightning, sounding sirens could desensitize the public to the sirens. Although flash floods present a threat, that threat is localized and typically in a known area. In addition, Flash Flood Warnings are often issued more than one hour before the flooding occurs, allowing local officials time for mitigation efforts, and eliminating the usefulness of community-wide sirens in this situation.

Local Life-Threatening Events

Non-weather emergencies (hazmat incident, terrorism, nuclear emergency, etc.) that pose a threat to those outdoors and require action to protect life will not be done via the outdoor warning sirens.

All Clear

There will be no “all clear” signal from outdoor warning sirens. Citizens are expected to be indoors and should monitor local media for additional information. A second sounding of the sirens indicates a continued or additional threat.

Testing

Outdoor warning sirens will be tested every Tuesday at 12:00pm beginning with Severe Weather Awareness Week in March through the month of June. Testing will be the first Tuesday of the month July through November. Sirens will not be regularly tested during the months of December, January and February. (A specific siren may be manually tested at any time for maintenance purposes, if conditions are acceptable).

This test may be canceled based on the current or forecast weather for the day. Outdoor warning siren tests will resume on the next regularly scheduled day.