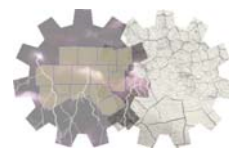




North Central Texas Outdoor Warning System Guidelines



Purpose: To describe the regional guidelines pertaining to use of outdoor warning systems in the North Central Texas Area (NCT), and to establish recommendations for their use.

I. Outdoor Warning System

An Outdoor Warning System (OWS) consists of siren(s) designed to alert citizens of approaching or existing hazardous conditions, which will require immediate protective actions in order to save lives and property. Traditionally, these systems have been mistakenly referred to as “tornado sirens” but the term fails to acknowledge all applications for sounding sirens. By verbal agreement, the NCT area shall refer to sirens as “Outdoor Warning Sirens” in an effort to reinforce the multiple conditions for which communities may sound sirens to alert citizens in outdoor areas. Additional work is necessary to change peoples' thinking of “tornado sirens” and instead think of Outdoor Warning Systems.

II. Reasons for Activation

Communities develop an outdoor warning system to alert and notify citizens in outdoor areas of emergency situations. These situations include but may not be limited to natural emergencies, transportation accidents involving hazardous materials, emergencies at fixed facilities, acts of terrorism or other catastrophic events in which the community needs to be informed immediately. Citizens in indoor areas should not mistakenly wait to hear a siren as their only source of warning information. A NOAA All Hazards Radio with Specific Area Message Encoding (SAME) technology is a good method of receiving warning messages indoors. Additionally, some communities maintain other warning systems to alert citizens indoors.

III. Activation Guidelines

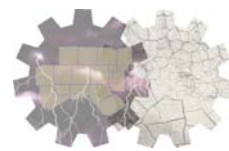
Even though communities vary in specific criteria for activating OWS, there are some commonalities in determining activation guidelines. Each community should review their activation criteria with policy makers on an annual basis in order to maintain a clear understanding of the community’s OWS and the capabilities by which the system can alert citizens in emergency conditions. Furthermore, at a minimum, efforts to brief the community of the OWS should be conducted annually.

The following are factors to consider as minimum activation guidelines:

- The National Weather Service issues a Tornado Warning or Severe Thunderstorm Warning with the phrase "Destructive winds in excess of 70 mph (or higher) are likely with this storm" for your immediate area. A community existing in multiple counties should pay close attention to the warning area.



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- Trained storm spotters have reported a tornado in the jurisdiction, or in a neighboring jurisdiction that has the potential to affect your community. (Each community should determine satisfactory methods for verifying tornado activity reports).
- Reported hail of 1.25” in diameter or greater. (1 inch may be more appropriate for areas or events where large numbers of people are outdoors)
- Other emergency as directed by the community’s elected officials.

IV. Notification of Activation

A community should make external notifications to neighboring communities as soon as possible indicating the OWS has been activated. During RACES net activations, the notification could be conducted by making an announcement via the amateur radio net in progress or other means available.

V. Additional Preparedness Actions

Public education should include information regarding the OWS. Explanation on when the OWS is activated, along with what actions should be taken during an OWS activation should be included in community public education efforts. Finally, communities are encouraged to complete the National Weather Service Storm Ready Program. According to the NWS, “StormReady communities are better prepared to save lives from the onslaught of severe weather through better planning, education, and awareness. No community is storm proof, but StormReady can help communities save lives”. Additional information about the StormReady Program can be found at www.stormready.noaa.gov.

VI. Monthly Testing

Communities in North Central Texas test their Outdoor Warning Systems (OWS) during the first week of each month based on their testing protocols. OWS will not be tested during periods in which severe weather is possible, so as to avoid confusion between actual severe weather and testing. Some cities may conduct additional testing to ensure systems are functioning properly as needed.

VII. References

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Outdoor Warning System Guide, CPG1-17R