

## **Outdoor Warning Sirens Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q:** How many Outdoor Warning Sirens are there in the City of Bloomington?

**A:** The City of Bloomington currently has 18 Outdoor Warning Sirens, Normal has 11 and Bloomington Township has 1 at Crestwick. The City of Bloomington's Sirens are designed to have a 1.5 mile radius coverage area based on the decibel level per the manufacturer.

**Q:** Who determines when these Sirens are activated?

**A:** The Sirens are activated from the McLean County Emergency Management Agency (EMA), with a backup at MetCom and Bloomington Dispatch Center. EMA has a network of trained weather spotters that are activated when severe weather conditions arise. The Bloomington Fire Department staffs the spotting position at # 5 station 2602 Six Points Rd. He/she communicates with Dispatch and EMA via radio. Typically reports of funnel clouds are verified by a spotter or other credible agency representative before the sirens are activated. It is important to realize that during a severe weather incident like this, it is typical to get hundreds of reports of funnel clouds all over our community. If the sirens were activated for every report, you would find that they would be sounding constantly through an entire thunderstorm event. This would make them ineffective as people would ignore the warning.

**Q:** How often are the Outdoor Warning Sirens tested?

**A:** We test the Sirens on the first Tuesday of every month, and try to ensure that all are operational during the test. As with any system, some failures do occur. The redundancy of the system allows for outdoor users to hear the sirens even when one closer may not sound, but this is also why it may not be heard indoors. The Engineering Division of Public Works has personnel who maintain and repair non-operational sirens. It is helpful for the public to assist us in identifying Sirens that are not operating during the monthly tests by calling our Dispatch Center at 820-8888.

**Q:** Why wasn't I able to hear one of these Outdoor Warning Sirens from inside of my home?

**A:** Outdoor Warning Sirens are designed for alerting people outside of their homes and away from other media sources, of imminent danger from an approaching storm. It is designed to warn these people outside to take cover immediately. The Sirens are not designed as a consistent warning system for people inside of structures. While sirens can be heard inside, there are a variety of factors that can influence someone's ability to hear the siren, such as topography, obstructions between the siren and the structure, construction of the building or residence, other noise sources (TV, radios, hail, wind, etc.), and distance from the Siren.

**Q:** What can I do to increase my personal safety during severe weather?

**A:** Individuals are responsible for monitoring conditions for their personal safety. The National Weather Service has created a warning system that consists of Watches and Warnings for a variety of weather conditions to keep people informed. These informational watches and warning are broadcast over TV and radio to keep us up to date on the changing conditions. Weather Alert Radios are designed to receive broadcasts from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through the National Weather Service (NWS). These devices only broadcast weather information and are a valuable tool for monitoring severe conditions and are available in both desktop and portable units.

**Q:** What is the difference between a Watch and a Warning?

**A:** A Watch (Severe Thunderstorm or Tornado) means that conditions are right for these types of storms to occur. During a Watch, people should monitor conditions and be prepared to take shelter. A Warning means that severe weather is occurring in the area (Thunderstorm or Tornado) at this time, and people should seek shelter immediately. People should not wait until the sirens are activated or a tornado is actually sighted in their specific area, as this is too late. A Warning is the time when people need to be in a protected place, monitoring conditions until they improve and the situation passes.