

New Unified Outdoor Warning Siren Guidelines

City of Rock Island

July 23, 2009

New unified outdoor warning siren guidelines have been adopted by the Quad City metro area due to the violent thunderstorm that swept through the Quad Cities about a year ago around 6 am. The storm caused widespread power outages and downed countless trees, killing 2 children and injuring 2 others. Severe thunderstorm winds can have as much or even a greater impact on a community than a tornado. The new outdoor warning siren guidelines address a variety of life-threatening weather hazards, and take into account the latest scientific and technological advances.

Outline of the Outdoor Warning Siren Guidelines

Under the Quad City Metro area outdoor warning system guidelines, sirens will be sounded for:

- tornadoes,
- thunderstorms with winds 70 mph or greater (potential for whole trees to snap or uproot), or
- golf ball sized hail or larger (potential for windows to break).

The same tone will be used for all threats in each community, and the sirens may be sounded multiple times during the threat. There will be no all-clear signal from sirens, as people should be indoors and monitoring local media for updates on the storm. Sirens will be tested simultaneously on the first Tuesday of each month.

Why the Guidelines are Important

When life-threatening weather is approaching, minutes or even seconds could make a difference. If people are unsure or confused about an alert, they may not respond quickly or appropriately. By adopting common outdoor warning system guidelines, confusion will be eliminated, response time will be reduced, and lives will be saved.

How the Guidelines Were Developed

Emergency management officials from Scott County, Rock Island County, and the Rock Island Arsenal developed the guidelines together in cooperation with the National Weather Service. Input on the draft guidelines was also sought from dispatch centers across the metro area. During the spring of 2009, the final guideline recommendations were then shared with community governments.

Communities throughout the Quad Cities have expressed strong support for a unified outdoor warning system policy. Within a few months of distribution, the guidelines were

formally adopted by the Rock Island Arsenal, Rock Island County, and Scott County, as well as the cities of Moline, East Moline, Rock Island, Davenport, and Bettendorf. Many smaller communities in the Quad Cities commuting area have also adopted the guidelines.

The adoption of a common outdoor warning siren policy is somewhat unique among metro areas, considering unanimous agreement from two counties and five cities spanning two states and a Federal site (Rock Island Arsenal). It shows the commitment of local officials to the safety of the community and improvement of the alert process.

Purpose of Outdoor Warning Sirens

Sirens are only one part of a warning system that includes preparation, NOAA Weather Radio, and local media partners. Sirens are an outdoor warning system designed only to alert those who are outside that something dangerous is approaching. When the sirens are heard, people should go inside and tune into local media to get more information. For alerts indoors, every home and business should have a NOAA Weather Radio All-Hazards. NOAA Weather Radio is like a smoke detector for severe weather, and it can wake you up when a warning is issued for your area so you can take appropriate action.

Get More Information

This news release, the outdoor warning siren guideline document, and other information are available on the National Weather Service Quad Cities web site.

- National Weather Service Quad Cities.....www.weather.gov/quadcities
- NOAA Weather Radio www.weather.gov/nwr
- Rock Island County Emergency Management..... www.co.rock-island.il.us/EMA.aspx?id=114
- Scott County Emergency Management www.scottcountyiowa.com/ema
- Rock Island Arsenal www.ria.army.mil/sites/riapo

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This news release was produced by the National Weather Service Quad Cities.