

# HENNEPIN COUNTY

## OUTDOOR WARNING CAPABILITIES

### Hennepin County Emergency Management

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### FREQUENT QUESTIONS

#### **Why can't I hear the sirens inside my house?**

*Outdoor Warning Sirens* are designed to warn people who are outside. The best choice for those indoors is to have a NOAA Weather Radio.

#### **How do Outdoor Warning Sirens work?**

Sirens project a sound wave that is loud enough to be heard across a large outdoor area and alert people to a danger. Most sirens in use in Hennepin County have a planning range of between 4800-5200 feet. Some powerful models have a planning range of 6200 feet, while a few smaller sirens in specialized locations only project around 800 feet.

Many factors effect how far the siren sound will travel, including siren height, air temperature, wind, ambient noise, vegetation and other obstructions. Usually people are able to hear several sirens around them.

#### **How many Outdoor Warning Sirens are there in Hennepin County?**

As of June 2012, there were 244 warning sirens in Hennepin County.

#### **Who owns the Outdoor Warning Sirens?**

Sirens are owned by the municipal government where they are located. These governments are responsible to obtain

the sirens, determine where they are positioned, and maintain them in operational condition.

### **How were Outdoor Warning Sirens purchased?**

The bulk of the *Outdoor Warning Siren* system is a legacy of World War II and the Cold War, especially the sirens in the urban areas and first ring suburbs. Sirens were an element of the Civil Defense program of the U.S. Department of Defense and were mostly funded through the federal government during the Cold War.

Most early sirens have been gradually replaced by newer models as resources allow. Growing areas in the outer suburbs obtain and locate new sirens through a number of methods and funding sources available to municipal governments.

### **Is Hennepin County completely served by Outdoor Warning Sirens?**

No. Developed areas of the county have very good siren coverage, but most rural areas in the northwest parts of Hennepin County are not fully covered by sirens.

### **Who is able to activate the Outdoor Warning Sirens?**

The primary siren activation location is the *County Warning Point (CWP)* part of the Hennepin County Sheriff's Communications Division. Supplemental siren activation facilities include the Minneapolis Emergency Communications Center, and Hennepin County Emergency Management. Other emergency back-up methods are available as well.

### **How are sirens chosen for activation during an emergency?**

Sirens can be sounded several ways in Hennepin County, including 1) as an entire county, 2) as one of four county warning zones, 3) as an individual city, or 4) as an individual siren. The most typical method used is activation by zone.

During severe weather, the National Weather Service provides the most important and useful recommendations to emergency management to sound sirens.

For industrial accident activation, an on-scene incident commander (typically a fire chief) would request siren activation for a certain area.

In the case of an enemy attack, siren activation would be directed by the United States government through the State of Minnesota.

### **How are sirens tested?**

Sirens are tested several times each week by silent electronic interrogation. Maintainers are able to detect if a siren needs repair using this method. At any given time, a very small number of sirens are under repair. This is another reason to have a broad and redundant system of alert and warning methods and sources. Most people are able to hear several siren locations while outdoors.

Audible monthly Outdoor Warning Siren tests happen on the first Wednesday of each month at 12:00 noon. These test feature both the steady ALERT SIGNAL, followed by a brief pause, and then by an ATTACK WARNING tone. This test only briefly activates the siren, typically for about one minute for each tone. Tests are NOT conducted if actual severe weather is forecast for the area.

### **What should you do when you hear a Monthly Siren Test?**

Use the *Monthly Siren Test* as an opportunity to improve your own readiness. Think about what you would do if the siren was an actual warning. At that moment, where would you take shelter? How would you get information?

Also, plan to use the practice siren activations that happen as part of *Severe Weather Awareness Week* each April in Minnesota. This is a great opportunity to practice what you would you would do at work, at home, or elsewhere.

### **When were Outdoor Warning Sirens first used for tornadoes in Hennepin County?**

May 6, 1965 during the great Twin Cities Outbreak

### **How many times are sirens sounded each year in Hennepin County for severe weather?**

A typical severe weather season in Hennepin County results in one or two siren activations.

