



***For immediate release***

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*(Part 1 of 2 series)*

## **Emergency Preparations for Severe Weather**

Preparing for a tornado or other severe weather is critical this time of the year. “Knowing what to do when you hear a tornado warning or a tornado siren is critical for you and the safety of your family,” states Heidi Wheeler, Emergency Response Coordinator for Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD). “We need to listen through the media for the latest emergency information from local authorities and be prepared with a disaster kit when we take shelter.”

Marc Harpham, Fire Chief for McCook Fire Department encourages McCook residents to stay alert and not rely only on tornado sirens for their warning system. “Sirens are only designed to be heard while you are outside so it is critical that you use several types of communication to keep safe in dangerous weather. Listening to local radio and television stations is a good start, as well as, NOAA weather alert radios.”

Many people rely on sirens for their only warning system but this is not recommended. The City of McCook has nine outdoor warning sirens installed and operating. They serve as a pre-event warning device. They are not required by law.

Sirens are simply another device to warn citizens in the community of any life threatening situation that requires emergency preparedness response actions by the population. For example, McCook’s sirens can also alert the public in case of a chemical or hazardous material release, such as a truck, train, or pipeline accident.

These sirens are also set to sound for any county-wide tornado warnings instead of storm-specific warnings. Thus, you may not be in immediate danger when the sirens are sounded.

McCook’s sirens are tested on the first Monday of every month at approximately 12:00 pm (Noon). All areas of the city are within audible range of a siren.

For more information on preparing a disaster kit, contact Heidi Wheeler, SWNPHD Emergency Response Coordinator at 308-345-4223 or email her at: [erc@swhealth.ne.gov](mailto:erc@swhealth.ne.gov). You can also go the SWNPHD office to pick up disaster kit information at 404 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street (1 block north of Arby's) in McCook. You can also follow us on Facebook.com/swnphd and Twitter@swpublichealth. The health department serves Chase, Dundy, Hayes, Hitchcock, Frontier, Furnas, Keith, Perkins and Red Willow counties.

If you have any questions on the outdoor sirens, contact Red Willow County Emergency Manager Alan Kotschwar at 345-1850, McCook Police Chief Ike Brown at 345-3450 or McCook Fire Chief Marc Harpham at 345-5710.

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