



Central Oklahoma Emergency Management Association Regional Outdoor Warning System Guidelines



Purpose

A responsibility of Emergency Management is to warn the public of approaching or existing hazardous conditions, which require immediate protective actions in order to save lives and reduce injuries. Outdoor Warning Systems (OWS) are but one method to warn the public. Almost all local jurisdictions have some form of OWS. The purpose of these guidelines is the coordination of the activation, operation, and testing of these systems between Central Oklahoma jurisdictions, which will be more effective and efficient, and benefit the public. These guidelines address the expected public action upon activation of the OWS.

Outdoor Warning System (OWS)

An Outdoor Warning System (OWS) consists of sirens designed to alert citizens of approaching and existing hazardous conditions, which require immediate protective actions in order to save lives and reduce injuries. While these systems have been commonly referred to as "tornado sirens," this term fails to acknowledge all applications of the OWS. By agreement, Central Oklahoma Emergency Management Directors shall refer to these sirens as an "Outdoor Warning System" to reinforce the multiple hazardous conditions for which communities may sound sirens to alert citizens in outdoor areas.

Outdoor Warning Systems are designed to alert citizens who are outside or outdoors; they are not designed to penetrate buildings and warn those inside structures. Citizens should not mistakenly wait to hear a siren as their only source of warning information. A National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) All-Hazards Radio with Specific Area Message Encoding (SAME) technology is a good method of receiving warning messages indoors. Additionally, warnings can be received from radio, television, subscription services (that use text messages, e-mails, and telephone messages), social media, and other available sources.

Expected Public Action Upon Activation

When a local jurisdiction's Outdoor Warning System is activated, the public should "Take Shelter and Seek More Information." Taking shelter is a personal decision and responsibility and may include moving indoors into a sturdy structure, going to a safe room or into a storm shelter. Seeking more information may include looking at or listening to various electronic media to learn the nature of the hazard or threat, its location, and timing as to impacting their community. Citizens, once they have received more information, can make informed decisions on what further protective measures to take.

No local jurisdiction issues an "All Clear" signal. Citizens must remain aware of their environment and situation to know when the threat no longer exists by monitoring their NOAA All Hazards Alert Weather Radio, television, radio, subscription services that use text messages, e-mails, telephone messages, social media, and other available sources.

Activation Guidelines

Each local jurisdiction determines when to activate their Outdoor Warning System, based on a validated imminent threat, considering the following factors:

- National Weather Service (NWS) Tornado Warning
- Credible report of tornadic conditions
- Location of the hazard or threat
- Timing of the hazard or threat



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Each local jurisdiction will activate their Outdoor Warning System based on circumstances and system capabilities to warn the threatened population. A jurisdiction may activate their Outdoor Warning System more than once during an event as new or additional threats are identified or move into or across their jurisdiction.

No local jurisdiction will issue an "All Clear" signal.

Local Option

Each local jurisdiction retains the option to activate their Outdoor Warning System for other hazardous conditions or threats that pose an immediately significant threat to life safety and may impact their community. Some examples of this Local Option would be: potential dam breaches, wildland fires, hazardous material incidents, or enemy attack. This is known as the "Local Option." Activation of a local jurisdiction's OWS under the Local Option may involve the use of a different siren tone, use of their OWS public address (voice message) capability; or both depending on the situation. Local Option activation of an OWS should immediately be followed with additional information given to the community regarding hazard or threat and the appropriate protective measures. A local jurisdiction with other types of warning or notification systems may use those systems to distribute warnings at the same time as their OWS activation.

Testing

All jurisdictions audibly test their Outdoor Warning System at least once per month on Saturday at noon.

The Saturday test of the OWS may be suspended for the following reasons:

- When the National Weather Service has issued a Severe Thunderstorm/Tornado Watch or Warning for the Central Oklahoma region
- Imminent threat of severe weather
- Freezing temperature below 32 degrees F
- Requests to not sound the system because of large outdoor special events, sporting events or ceremonies

Jurisdictions may conduct a silent test of their OWS at their own discretion.

Activation Notification

A local jurisdiction activating its Outdoor Warning System should make external notifications to neighboring communities as soon as practical indicating their OWS has been activated.