



The Risk: Sleeping. Working. Playing baseball. Celebrating a graduation. The people most at risk in any severe weather situation are those who are not aware of the threat. Simply put: you must *know* in order to *act*! Once aware of an impending threat, you can protect yourself, your family and friends, and perhaps even your property if time allows. Numerous types of warning systems exist, each with its own strengths and weaknesses.

Outdoor Warning Systems

When it comes to severe weather, outdoor warning systems (a.k.a. sirens) have one purpose and one purpose only: to alert people who are outdoors that something dangerous is happening and they should go inside. Depending on local policy, sirens may be sounded for a variety of life-threatening hazards, but always with the intent that people outdoors should seek shelter.



There are many misconceptions about outdoor warning sirens. Talk to local officials to find out: Does your community have them? When are they sounded? Do they have backup power? When are they tested?

Key Points:

- Not designed to be heard indoors
- Backup power capability varies

NOAA Weather Radio



Like a smoke detector, NOAA Weather Radios wait in standby mode until a warning is issued. When the National Weather Service issues a warning, the radios alarm and broadcast the warning, so you can take appropriate action.

Key Points:

- Alert function wakes you up so you can take action!
- Programmable for the area of interest
- Radios have battery backup power

Cell Phone Alerts

Today’s technology allows almost every cell phone to act as a personal warning device. In general, there are two types of cell phone alert systems: those that alert everyone in the area and those that require individuals to “opt-in”.



Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA): WEA is a national system operated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). WEA sends tornado warnings and a limited number of other warnings to all cell phones within an affected cell tower’s range.

Local Alert Systems: Some local communities have developed local alert systems that send warning messages to cell phones, land lines, email addresses, etc. One example of such a system is “Alert Iowa”, which is available in a growing number of communities across the state. Local alert systems typically send certain alerts to all people in the area and then also allow you to register to “opt-in” to an expanded set of alerts. Capabilities of these systems vary widely, so check with local officials to find out what is available in your area.

Cell Phone Apps: There are numerous apps available for download that expand the alerting capability of your cell phone, including apps developed by the American Red Cross, TV stations, and private weather companies.

Key Points:

- Alert functions vary widely.
- Know the alerts you need, and sign up for those.
- Check with local officials to learn more.

The Bottom Line:

Living in the most severe weather prone country in the world, your best defense is to be both prepared and informed. Take charge of your alerts! Know how you will be alerted, stay informed, and take action – indoors or out!

Find out more:

NOAA Weather Radio www.weather.gov/nwr
National Weather Service www.weather.gov

FEMA Alerts www.ready.gov/alerts
Red Cross Preparedness..... www.redcross.org