



# Johnson County Siren Guidelines

NOAA NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

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## Overview of the New Johnson County Siren Guidelines



Under the revised Johnson County outdoor warning system guidelines, sirens are sounded for:

- Tornado Warnings, either Doppler radar indicated or reported by a trained spotter.
- Severe thunderstorms Warnings **if they contain** winds of 70 mph or greater (potential for whole trees to snap or uproot), or contain,
- 1.75 inch (Golf ball sized) hail or larger (potential for windows to break).
- The same tone will be used for all weather-related threats throughout the County.
- Sirens may be sounded multiple times to convey a continued or new threat(s).
- We do not sound an all-clear signal with the sirens. (People should be indoors monitoring the weather.)
- Sirens are tested on the first Wednesday of each month starting at 10 am.

- Sirens run for 3 minutes once activated.
- The County is zoned into four (4) zones for activation(s). Those are Red for the North part of the County, White for the Central part of the County and Blue for the Southern part of the County. A Green zone is used for Warnings that threaten the entire County or cross all three (3) zones. City specific sirens may also be activated. Presently rural Johnson County has four (4) outdoor sirens and plans to add another six (6) using grant funds, later in 2012. This will cover the more densely populated or heavily used recreation areas of the County.

## Purpose of Sirens

Outdoor sirens are only one part of an overall warning system that includes preparation, NOAA Weather Radio, and local media partners as well as commercial text and smart phone messages. 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 for more information. We do not sound an all clear.

## Indoor Alerts

For alerts indoors, every home and business should have a NOAA Weather Radio All-Hazards Weather Radio is like a smoke detector for severe weather - designed to wake and alert people when a warning is issued for their area so appropriate action can be taken.



## Background on the Guidelines

### Why the Common 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.

### How the Guidelines Were Developed

Emergency management officials from Johnson County, and the National Weather Service in Davenport, developed the guidelines together. Input on the draft guidelines was also sought from dispatch centers across Iowa and is consistent with policies in Scott, Polk, Black Hawk, and Linn Counties. During the winter of 2012, the final guidelines were shared with communities and are to be implemented on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2012



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why will the outdoor warning sirens be sounded for hail and wind?

When thunderstorm winds exceed 70 mph, trees can be uprooted or snapped. Hail that is golf ball sized or larger can break windows. Both of these things pose a direct and immediate risk to life if people are caught outdoors.

### How often can I expect the sirens to sound for severe weather?

On average, the Johnson County area experiences about four (4) storms each year that would meet the siren guidelines. A review of the National Weather Service database for Johnson County finds that since 1995, we would expect to have had an average of four (4) activations per year under these new criteria.

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

Sirens are an outdoor warning system designed only to alert those who are outside that something dangerous is approaching. Though they are sometimes heard in buildings they are not designed to alert people inside of structures.

### How can I get alerts when I'm at work or in my house?

For alerts indoors, every home and business should have a NOAA All-Hazards weather radio, which acts like a smoke detector for severe weather to alert you when a warning is issued so you can take appropriate action, there are also many free and/or subscription services that send messages to your home or cell phones during alerts.

### Will the sirens warn me of every dangerous storm?

The short answer is No! Every situation is different, and nothing can replace common sense. If a storm is approaching, the lightning alone is a threat. Winds significantly lower than 70 mph may down branches or overturn objects, leading to the potential for injury or death. Sirens are only one part of a warning system that includes awareness, preparation, NOAA Weather Radio, and local media.

### Who activates the sirens?

Though sirens are owned and maintained by the cities and county where they are located, the Johnson County Joint Emergency Communications Center activates them based on procedures written by Johnson County Emergency Management. The center is staffed 24/7 and monitors for NOAA weather alerts.

## The Bottom Line

*When outdoor warning sirens are heard,  
go indoors and tune into local media to get more information.*

#### Resources On the web:

- National Weather Service Quad Cities ..... [www.weather.gov/quadcities](http://www.weather.gov/quadcities)
- Johnson County Emergency Management.....[www.johnson-county.com/dept\\_emergency\\_home](http://www.johnson-county.com/dept_emergency_home)
- Red Cross Preparedness..... [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
- NOAA Weather Radio..... [www.weather.gov/nwr](http://www.weather.gov/nwr)
- EF Scale for Evaluating Tornado Damage ..... [www.spc.noaa.gov/faq/tornado/ef-scale.html](http://www.spc.noaa.gov/faq/tornado/ef-scale.html)
- Be Ready Iowa Emergency Preparedness.....[www.beready.iowa.gov](http://www.beready.iowa.gov)
- FEMA – Emergency Preparedness.....[www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)
- Free Email & Text Message Alerts.....<http://www.weatherusa.net/alerts>