By Jan Schultz
The Imperial Republican

An emergency message delivery system will soon be in place in Chase County, that will inform residents quickly of weather alerts, road closings, evacuations, school closings and more.

Spearheaded by Chase County's Emergency Manager Paul Kunnemann, the Code Red notification system is expected to be in operation in the coming months.

At separate meetings this week, the Imperial city council and Chase County Schools board of education approved participation in the notification system.

Those entities join Chase County, Chase County Community Hospital and the city of Wauneta, all which previously voted to be participants.

Hayes County will also be "piggy-backing" on the Chase County-wide system, Kunnemann said.

At Monday's city council meeting, Kunnemann said when an emergency arises, a command given to the computer will activate the system, and the calls will start.

Residents will be able to be contacted via their land line phones, cell phones, emails or texts, Kunnemann said.

Kunnemann said the county has also chosen to participate in an additional weather notification service as part of Code Red.

When an alert is issued by the National Weather Service, those residents in the path of the storm or tornado will specifically be contacted by the call or email, he said.

Each of the participating entities will pay $715 annually to take part. Chase County funds will pay the additional $2,000 for the weather notification system. Hayes County will also pay an additional $500 per year for the weather alerts.

Brian Carman, the hospital's maintenance supervisor who was at Monday's council meeting, said they foresee a lot of benefit at the hospital.

It will save time in reaching their staff in event of major traumas or mass casualties, he said.

Now, the hospital alerts personnel via a calling tree, which takes about 25 minutes to get everyone called, Carman said.

"This will save a tremendous amount of time in the event of small or large traumas," he said.

Kunnemann indicated there will be no additional equipment needed to implement the system.

Kunnemann said area counties including Perkins, Dundy and Keith all are on the same Code Red notification system.

Chase County Schools' board of education has been looking at a separate emergency calling system to implement for several months, and in the last month, had entered into a contract for the "Alert Now" system.

Discussion of such a system started last year after the phoned-in bomb threat at the school in April, 2008.

At Tuesday's meeting, however, they voted to go with the Code Red system.

Supt. Matt Fisher had indicated to board members last month that it might be awhile before the county system was up and running. Since last meeting, however, he was contacted by

Kunnemann about the Code Red system, and that they were moving along quickly in getting it in service.

In addition, by participating in the Code Red system with the other entities here, it will save the school about $600 per year, Fisher said.

The down side, Fisher noted, was it will probably be a little longer in getting it set up now, and most likely won't be in use this school year. The school's contract with Alert Now will be cancelled.

Additional sirens tested

Imperial residents may have heard some blowing sirens in town Tuesday afternoon.

Kunnemann said they were doing the tests to determine the best placement for two additional tornado/severe weather alert sirens in the northwest and southeast parts of town.

Now, the city is served by just one siren at the courthouse.

Placement of the additional sirens is dependent on grant funds, Kunnemann said.

He is applying for funding for the sirens through FEMA's hazard mitigation money. Each siren has a price tag of $10,000.

If the FEMA grant is received, it would pay 75 percent of the cost. The city would be responsible for the additional $5,000.

The council's 3-0 vote to proceed with the additional sirens was "on the contingency the grant funds are received."

Kunnemann said he is also requesting the grant funds for sirens at Enders Lake, the community of Enders and in Champion. If the grant money is received, the current siren in Champion will be moved to Lamar.

Kunnemann said the additional sirens would be sounded in the event of fires, as well.