

Chase County led state for most tornadoes in 2008

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Next Monday, April 6, marks the beginning of Severe Weather Awareness Week in Nebraska.

To prepare citizens for the severe weather, Imperial will participate in a statewide tornado drill at 9:35 a.m. MDT next Wednesday, April 8.

Paul Kunnemann, director of Chase County Emergency Management, said tornado sirens across the state will sound at that time.

In Imperial, Kunnemann reminded residents that sirens will blast a solid tone rather than the oscillating tone for a fire.

The solid blast indicates to residents that a tornado is approaching Imperial and they should seek shelter immediately.

A basement or underground shelter is the best option. If possible take a weather radio or AM/FM radio along.

If no basement is available, go to the interior part of the lowest floor, such as a bathroom or closet, and get under something sturdy if possible.

For people in mobile homes, automobiles and in open space, try to get to some type of shelter. If that's not possible, lie flat in a low-lying area, such as a ditch or culvert. Protect the head by covering it with one's arms.

Chase County led state in 2008

According to the National Weather Service, Chase County led the state last year with the most tornadoes—five.

Kunnemann said hopefully that won't be the case this year. Statewide, a total of 59 tornadoes were reported last year.

Last year, the first tornado occurred in late April with the last one in mid-August.

The first tornado in Chase County last year occurred on May 22 in the southeast part of the county.

June 4 proved to be a busy day for spotters last year. On that day, a very intense super-cell storm moved east across Chase and Hayes Counties producing five tornadoes.

Two tornadoes touched down west-southwest of Champion and overturned pivot irrigation systems and broke off trees and power poles. The next tornado hit a farmstead south of Champion destroying outbuildings, tearing a roof off a garage and damaging the roof of a house.

The storm produced another brief tornado northeast of Wauneta before exiting Chase County. Later that night, a tornado touched down in Hayes County, northeast of Hamlet.

All of the tornadoes on June 4 were rated either EF-0 or EF-1 on the Enhanced Fujita Scale. The scale is as follows: EF-0 (Gale); EF-1 (Weak); EF-2 (Strong); EF-3 (Severe); EF-4 (Devastating); EF-5 (Incredible).

Kunnemann noted that Chase County and all of southwest Nebraska rest inside the national "tornado alley."

Reeder retires as deputy director

Kunnemann said Junior Reeder has retired as the deputy director of Chase County's emergency management.

Reeder has served in that post for the past 28 years. Kunnemann said Reeder is to be

recognized for his dedication and the many hours spent protecting lives in Chase County.

Joining Kunnemann as spotters this year will be Joe Weiss, Earl Loop, Rick Moses, Kelsey Weiss and Cory Schuller in Imperial; Bill Bischoff and Bobby Goings in Wauneta; Duane Dreiling and Don Welch in Champion; and Ron Berry and Mark Berry in Lamar.

Best plan? Be prepared!

Deb Blondin with the Weather Service in North Platte urged people to develop a plan at home, work, school or outdoors before bad weather strikes.

Some pre-planning and drills can make a big difference when severe weather occurs.

She noted the difference between weather alerts for a watch and a warning.

A “watch” is issued when conditions are favorable for the development of severe weather in the watch area.

A “warning” means severe weather has been detected by radar or storm spotters. When a warning is issued, people should seek shelter immediately.

Warnings can be issued without a watch in effect since strong thunderstorms can produce tornadoes with little or no notice.

For more information, go to <http://www.crh.noaa.gov/lbf/> and click on the Severe Weather Awareness Week link near the top of the page.