County residents need to get registered to be alerted of storms, emergencies

By Jan Schultz
The Imperial Republican

Plans are being finalized this week for the new CodeRED emergency alert system, which will alert county residents and businesses of approaching storms or emergencies such as school closings.

County Emergency Manager Paul Kunnemann said all Chase County residents and businesses can start registering their phone numbers or email addresses on Monday, April 20.

CodeRED is an early warning notification system to help all residents in Chase County receive alerts about natural or man-made type disasters.

There are numerous situations in which the system could be activated—storms, utility outages, street closings, terroristic threats, water use restrictions, snow emergencies, evacuation routes, chemical spills, gas leaks and more.

Joining Chase County as participants in the CodeRED alert system include the city of Imperial, Chase County Schools, Chase County Community Hospital and the village of Wauneta.

The Chase County Emergency Management Agency will use the phone book to get a majority of the numbers in the county, but all citizens will still need to register their phone numbers for the automated tornado and other weather-related warnings.

The county paid additional money to receive a separate weather alert system. However, that system cannot automatically use the phone book numbers, Kunnemann said, because of legal issues.

That's why everyone needs to contact the county via the Internet or by phone to register their numbers.

Kunnemann said, starting on Monday, there will be a CodeRED link on the county's website for signup at www.co.chase.ne.us

If people don't have Internet access or prefer to call and register their contact information, they can call either 308-882-4748 or 882-7520.

People or businesses will be able to register both a primary and secondary phone number, as well as an email address (for future use) at which to be contacted.

Kunnemann warned that the system is only as good as the numbers in it. If your phone number isn't registered, you won't be called when emergencies or storms arise.

No one should automatically assume his or her phone number is included. Those with unlisted numbers should also register, he said, or they won't be contacted.

Kunnemann said it would be ideal if all numbers could be registered by the end of next week.

At that time, CodeRED plans to do a test call.

Participation by the city and Chase County Schools allows their administrators to initiate their own emergency messages, Kunnemann noted. Each of those entities has its own access code.

As an example, if a water main breaks in the city of Imperial, city officials can send out the alert using their own access code, without Kunnemann's involvement. That alert would be specific to the city residents only.

Likewise, at Chase County Schools, if there is need for emergency contacts such as a school closing, administrators can key in their access code and alert families of their students.

The hospital can utilize the system, for instance, when they need to contact staff quickly in the event of a disaster resulting in numerous casualties.

All of the calling is computer-generated and the calls are done quickly.

In order to be on the call list, a resident or business must have a street or Chase County address, Kunnemann said.

Each of the participating government agencies are paying $714 per year to take part. The county is paying the additional $2,000 for the weather alert system.

Kunnemann noted the weather alert system can be targeted to specific areas.

When a weather alert is issued by the National Weather Service, only those residents in the path of the storm or tornado will be called, not everyone in the county, unless the entire county in involved.

The same CodeRed system is currently being used in Perkins County, as well as Lincoln, Keith and Garden Counties.

Hayes County is “piggy-backing” on the Chase County system, Kunnemann said, and is paying the same $714 per year as the other entities and an additional $500 to be included in the weather alerts.

Questions and answers on CodeRED

How do I sign up for CodeRED®?

Next week, the county’s website will have a link to a CodeRED® Residential Data Collection Form you can fill out online. This is the quickest, easiest way to sign up because the information you supply will immediately update your community’s CodeRED® telephone number database. If you do not have access to the Internet, call 308-882-4748 or 882-7520.

For what kinds of situations will CodeRED® be used?

Hurricanes and other types of severe weather, wildfire, water main breaks, alerts concerning a missing child or adult, road closings, traffic alerts, law enforcement emergencies, hazardous material spills—in short, any and all emergencies and community alerts.

I have a cordless phone, and it does not work when the power goes out. How will I be contacted?

There are two ways you can continue to receive telephone messages through CodeRED®:
1. Make sure you have at least one working corded telephone—and be sure to turn the ringer on.
2. The CodeRED® “Residential Data Collection” sign-up form gives you the option of filling in both a primary phone number and an alternate phone number. You can fill in the alternate phone number blank with your cell telephone number, or you can make it your primary phone number if you wish. Entering an alternate phone number will cause BOTH your primary and alternate phone numbers to be called.

Can I arrange to have CodeRED® call my place of business?

Yes. Go to the county’s website and click on the CodeRED® link. When the Residential Data Collection form opens, click on the button labeled “Click to Switch to Business Data” and fill in the required information. Please note that emergency calls can only be delivered to a direct dial number. Automated attendants will disrupt the process and calls will not be delivered.

Can I choose NOT to receive CodeRED® messages?

Yes. The county respects your privacy.
If you do not want to receive calls, please notify the county, preferably in writing. However, we strongly advise you to reconsider. CodeRED® is designed to make certain you receive fast, accurate emergency information directly from the officials whose job is to help protect you and your family.

I live near your county, but I am not a resident. Can I sign up for CodeRED®?

No, unfortunately. Chase County and other government entities in the county pay for CodeRED® service based on the population. However, we encourage you to check with the county or city in which you live. Many use automated telephone notification systems to alert residents in times of emergency.