

By Carolyn Lee

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Perhaps you've just moved to Imperial. You're washing the car the first Saturday of the month and a long siren fills the air at 10 a.m. What does it mean?

And why does a shorter siren sound at 7 a.m., 12 noon and 6 p.m. every day?

The siren sounded for three minutes at 10 a.m. the first Saturday of each month is a test of the tornado siren.

County Emergency Manager Paul Kunnemann said the siren, which sounds in Imperial, Wauneta, Champion, Enders and Enders Reservoir, is being tested "to make sure it's running."

In case of a severe thunderstorm, which might contain hail or a tornado, the siren is sounded at Kunnemann's direction.

As for the timing of the test, "It's been a standard deal forever," he noted.

The three-a-day siren has been sounded a very long time, according to Chas Browning, who joined the Imperial Volunteer Fire Department in 1948. It was blaring then.

He said the siren sounded "to tell if the fire whistle would work or not." Now, "I guess it's just so people could set their clocks."

City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland said she checked with the county several years ago as to whose responsibility the three-a-day siren was.

She learned it was the city's, but doesn't know the history of the times it's sounded.

Following a question by Jim and Linda Pirog, owners of The Balcony House Bed & Breakfast, several years ago, Leyland sent out a survey concerning the three-a-day whistle blowing.

"Overwhelmingly people wanted to keep it," she said. "A bunch of people responded that when the whistle blows at 6 p.m. that's when kids know to come home."

The City Council at that time decided not to change or eliminate the whistle times.

But why those times? Several people suggested that years ago, that's when people left for work, traveled home for lunch, and completed work.

The dispatcher on duty at the Chase County Sheriff's office pushes a button to activate the siren according to schedule.

Kunnemann said, "The siren system is basically my responsibility. If something goes down, I get it fixed."

He noted that the city and council work together to maintain and run the sirens.