

County's warning system getting 'official' test this Thursday at noon

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Chase County was included in a severe thunderstorm warning last Wednesday night, April 29, and the conditions warranted the first use of the new CodeRed warning notification system.

But, not everyone got the call who had registered to be called, said County Emergency Manager Paul Kunnemann, and that has caused some confusion.

And, a bunch of phone calls.

Kunnemann said he's fielded a lot of calls since last week, and wants people to know, "We're working on it."

Kunnemann is unsure whether the CodeRed system called people in a specific path of last week's storm, or the system got overloaded when trying to dial all the numbers.

He thinks it's probably the latter.

County employees hadn't officially tested the program as of last week, and coincidentally, were just training on it during the work day last Wednesday, Kunnemann said.

An official CodeRed "test" will take place today (Thursday) at 12 noon (MT), Kunnemann said.

People who have registered their phone numbers with the county or have a land line phone (which automatically registers that home or business) will be called in this test, he said.

When a CodeRed warning is issued, the phone will ring three times. When the phone is answered, it will give a prerecorded message identifying the emergency or what type of bad weather is approaching, Kunnemann said.

If the phone is not answered, it will go to voice mail (if equipped) and leave a message.

The problems experienced last week in the actual CodeRed warning is a good reason the test this Thursday is needed, Kunnemann said.

He said it was well worth issuing the CodeRed warning on April 29. Late that night, the county was placed in two severe thunderstorm warnings about an hour apart.

Kunnemann went out about 10 p.m. that night with five other spotters watching the approaching conditions. He said there were two to three different cells brewing.

It worsened enough that the National Weather Service then issued the first severe thunderstorm warning at 10:45 p.m., followed by a second at 11:40 p.m.

After the second warning, the CodeRed was issued. There was heavy rain and some hail, and though it didn't happen last week, those were the types of conditions that could have developed into tornadoes, he said.

Kunnemann encourages county residents to be patient. He expects some of the questions to be answered after Thursday's test.

"The test will determine if the messages are going out to who they're supposed to," he said. Still can register numbers

As of Monday, Kunnemann said there are over 3,000 phone numbers in the county already registered in the system.

People can still register their phone numbers (and an email address if they choose) with the county's CodeRed system.

Numbers from land line phones in Chase County have been automatically entered into the

system for non-weather related emergencies such as terroristic threats, snow emergencies, evacuations, gas leaks or chemical spills.

However, due to legal issues, if your home or business wishes to be called for weather-related emergencies (whether it has a land line or just cell phones), people must call the county or register online to get the weather notifications.

The county, city of Imperial, village of Wauneta, Chase County Community Hospital and Chase County Schools are all CodeRed participants.

Kunnemann said people will not be assessed a fee on their phone bills for CodeRed. Tax dollars and funding from the above entities are paying for the service.

People must be Chase County residents to take advantage of the system.

To register online, visit www.co.chase.ne.us and click on the CodeRed logo. Those without Internet access can call the county at 308-882-8432 or 308-882-7520.