

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

County storm spotters are wondering these days if they should plan any personal activities.

With calls out to watch the skies seemingly every afternoon or night in recent weeks, County Emergency Manager Paul Kunnemann wonders if more is ahead for him and his spotters.

While most of the storms have included hail, wind and heavy rain, the past week also included sounding of the tornado siren three different times.

The siren was sounded twice Friday about 11 a.m. and an hour later, and again Monday about 5 p.m.

Since sounding of the tornado siren isn't usually a common practice, Kunnemann this week reviewed when and how the warning system is used.

The tornado siren will be sounded if a warning is issued by the National Weather Service, if area spotters witness a tornado or if there are threatening rotations spotted in the clouds.

The tornado siren will sound for a three-minute cycle, Kunnemann said, and then stop.

It will only be sounded a second time during the same storm if a tornado is actually spotted on the ground, he said. That second siren will likely be longer than the first three-minute cycle, he added, indicating the more serious situation.

Kunnemann said emergency officials cannot run the siren continuously because that will burn up the system.

That happened in Wauneta a couple of years ago when that community faced a series of tornadoes coming at it.

"It blew out the system," he said.

Kunnemann and staff in the sheriff's office are working on getting a "clear" signal set up, that would alert residents the danger is over. It would differ in sound from the tornado and fire sirens.

But for now, local residents can tune into Imperial's KADL Radio, which Kunnemann will contact after the danger is passed for them to announce. He encourages people to have battery-operated radios in the sections of their homes used for weather emergencies.

The radio is also contacted for announcements each time severe thunderstorm and tornado warnings are issued.

It may have been confusing to residents with tornado sirens sounding twice on Friday. Those were two separate storms that had strong cloud rotations, Kunnemann noted, and is why the tornado siren was sounded twice, giving the initial warning for each storm system.

In all three instances Friday and Monday, tornado funnels were not spotted, Kunnemann said. Once the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) concludes a review on funding, Kunnemann said five additional sirens could be placed throughout Chase County.

The funding requests have been submitted for placing sirens near Schroeder Park and the county shop in Imperial, in the community of Enders, at Enders Lake and in Champion.

Champion currently has a siren, but if the new one is approved, it will be moved to Lamar.

CodeRED system questions

There are still some inconsistencies with the county's CodeRED warning system, Kunnemann said.

Some residents who have signed up for the phone alerts of approaching bad weather or other emergencies are not always getting the calls.

Part of the problem, he said, is the incompatibilities between CodeRED and the local phone company.

“We’re trying to get it worked out,” he said.

Also, if someone is using their cell phone or is out of range for Imperial when the CodeRED is issued from Imperial, they won’t receive the alert. There are also some other problems with cell phones.

System overloads have also been experienced. As an example, Kunnemann said the CodeRED had to be issued 10 times to get all the numbers called during Monday’s 5 p.m. CodeRED in town.

However, everyone in Champion and Lamar received their CodeRED notifications when those areas were called about an hour later, Kunnemann said.

That’s because there were fewer calls to be made in those smaller communities.