



This picture was taken by George (Pappy) Lies, Logan-Gove Emergency Management Director, in Gove County last May.

Sirens sound; what do our schools do?

By Brandy Leroux
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If a tornado rips through Norton during school hours, most parents might rush to their kids' schools, anxious to see them, to make sure they are OK. That is just what the schools don't want — frantic parents looking for their children.

"Trust that the kids are safe," says high school principal Rudy Perez. "These buildings were built with tornado protection in mind. These buildings are probably better able to withstand a tornado than most other places in town."

"If a student needs medical assistance, we will call emergency services and the parents."

In the event a tornado does come through town, though, the Norton School District has an emergency

plan in place. First, said Principal Perez, when a tornado warning is issued, all teachers take their students to the hallway. The students have had drills on this procedure several times a year since kindergarten.

They sit down with their backs to a wall, pull their knees up to their chests, tuck their heads between their knees and lock their fingers together on the back of their necks. They stay in that position until the all-clear is given, which comes from police dispatch to the main office.

Then, each teacher takes a head count and lets the office know if anyone needs help or if anyone is missing. All teachers, by state law, know basic first aid. Several teachers, including Principal Perez,

are certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation. In the event of a tornado, all law enforcement officers would be called in to duty, and one officer is designated to go to the school district office.

If phone lines are operable, and medical assistance is needed, the office will call police dispatch and the parents of any student affected. If phone lines are down, every school's main office, including the district office, has a two-way radio to communicate with each other, always charged and ready to go.

Plans for students with special needs are revised every year as the students' schedule changes.

After a tornado strike, the law enforcement officer would go to each school with Superintendent Greg Mann, and determine

if it is safe to evacuate the students. Teachers will then take their students to pre-designated sites and do another head count. Superintendent Mann said teachers and staff will be posted at all entryways to the schools to ensure the students remain safely in the buildings until they get to the evacuation sites. Parents will not be allowed into the schools to pick up their children.

"As a school, our first priority is to our students and their safety," said Mr. Perez. The schools will announce on the radio where the evacuation sites are. This is where parents can pick up their kids. If parents are injured or unable to pick up their kids, the persons on their emergency contact sheet will be allowed to take them. If a

person is not on the emergency contact sheet, they will not be allowed to leave with the student.

Mr. Perez said tornadoes and other disasters are unpredictable, and emergency plans have to be flexible. Things could change at the drop of a hat, depending on the situations.

It is important for parents to trust the schools to take care of their children, he said. Every year, the

tornado plans are tweaked.

Mr. Perez said a bomb threat and evacuation a couple of years ago really helped school officials see what parts of the plan needed to change. He noted that parents should not try to contact their children through cell phones. Students may not be fully aware of what is going on around them, he said, and might give incorrect information to already panicky parents.

Advice is simple: Take cover!

NOAA's National Weather Service has issued a report that analyzes forecasting performance and public response during the second deadliest February tornado outbreak in U.S. history. The report, Service Assessment of the Super Tuesday Tornado Outbreak of Feb. 5-6, 2008, also addresses a key area of concern: why some people take cover while others ride out severe weather.

Jack Hayes, director of NOAA's National Weather Service, included a researcher from the National Center for Atmospheric Research Societal Impacts Program on the assessment team to examine why many people did not take action to protect themselves.

In reviewing the public re-

sponse, the team found that two-thirds of the victims were in mobile homes, and 60 percent did not have access to safe shelter (i.e., a basement or storm cellar). The majority of the survivors interviewed for the assessment sought shelter in the best location available to them, but most of them also did not have access to a safe shelter. Some indicated they thought the threat was minimal because February is not within traditional tornado season. Several of those interviewed said they spent time seeking confirmation and went to a safe location only after they saw a tornado. Many people minimized the threat of personal risk through "optimism bias," the belief that such bad things only

happen to other people.

On forecasting performance, the assessment team found that the National Weather Service issued warnings 17 minutes, on average, in advance of all the deadly tornadoes. The agency's Storm Prediction Center had been monitoring the tornado threat for several days. Local forecast offices forewarned communities by issuing hazardous weather outlooks days in advance.

According to the assessment team's recommendation, the National Weather Service will improve wording and call-to-action statements to more effectively convey the urgency and danger of the message. The agency also will continue using social sci-

ence research in future service assessments to further understand people's interpretation of and response to severe weather situations, and to improve public response to severe weather communication.

Use of societal impact studies is useful for weather phenomena other than tornadoes. In September 2008 dozens of people died when Hurricane Ike struck Galveston, Texas, even after the weather forecast office in Houston issued a dire warning to residents to heed evacuation orders.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources.

Norton City Sirens

TAKE COVER: An oscillating tone 8 times means take cover - a tornado has been sighted.

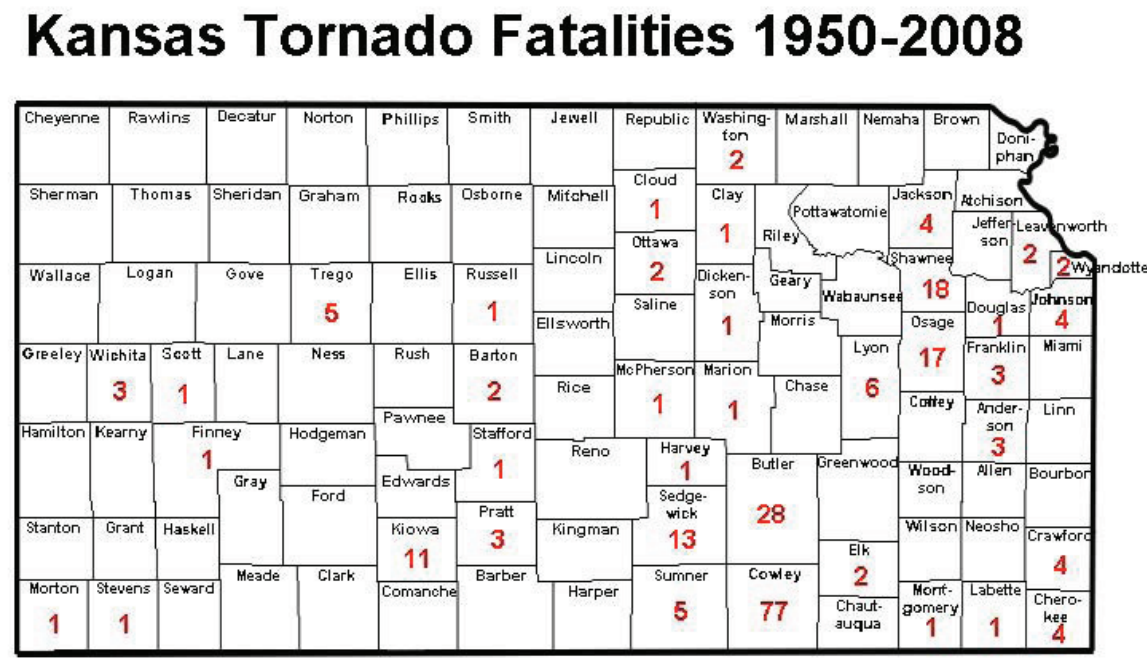
ALL CLEAR: Oscillating tone 4 times means all clear, danger is past.

Sirens blown one time means a call for Rural Firemen

Sirens blown two times means a call for City Firemen.

Turn to KQNK Radio FM 106.7 or 1530 AM. For those who live in the country, the radio station will sound the alert. The sirens are an outdoor warning device. If you are indoors you will need a battery operated radio to hear the all clear alerts and further weather information.

(CUT OUT AND POST)



Be safe, not sorry. Take cover at the first sound of the sirens.

- The Norton Telegram

Think you're prepared for the storm?

Before the storm

Reconsider your coverage:

- Not all policies cover water damage, debris or tree removal, sewer backup due to flooding, sump pump failure or the costs of having to stay somewhere while your home is repaired.
- Do you have comprehensive coverage on your vehicle in case of hail?
- Did you add flood insurance (a FEMA-run program) to your homeowners' policy?
- Have you updated your home inventory?

After the storm

Claims, repairs and settlements:

- Contact your agent immediately to report losses, and take notes about your conversation.
- Take photos of damage.
- Get instructions from your adjuster before making repair arrangements.
- Don't get scammed by questionable contractors.
- Don't accept an unfair settlement. If you can't reach a settlement with your insurance company, call our Consumer Assistance Hotline at 800-432-2484.

Kansas Insurance Department

Sandy Praeger, Commissioner of Insurance

www.ksinsurance.org

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