

Why not test sirens every month of the year?

The February tornado outbreak points up a flaw in emergency planning for many Kansas counties: no one pays any attention to the sirens and other parts of the emergency warning system from November through February.

Most cities and counties wait until “tornado season” approaches in March before they test the sirens and put the system through its paces. That works fine. Most years.

And while it’s true that the tiny Kansas town of Harveyville got no warning before it was hit because the tornado there literally dropped out of the sky, it requires a bunch of what-ifs to say that we don’t need to worry about tornadoes in winter.

Nature, it seems, does not know about the “season” dates for her little productions. She sends out tornadoes when she darn well feels like it.

A huge tornado came over Colorado’s Wolf Creek Pass a few years ago, laying waste to timber for miles and scaring the bejebbers out of some Texas elk hunters, who knew a twister when they saw one.

“Everyone” knew that none of that could happen: no tornadoes on the Continental

Divide, no tornadoes in late October, no tornadoes in the Colorado high country. If it weren’t for all those broken trees, people might have thought those hunters were imagining things.

Then a few years ago, a tornado west of Hays damaged houses in November, barely a week before Thanksgiving.

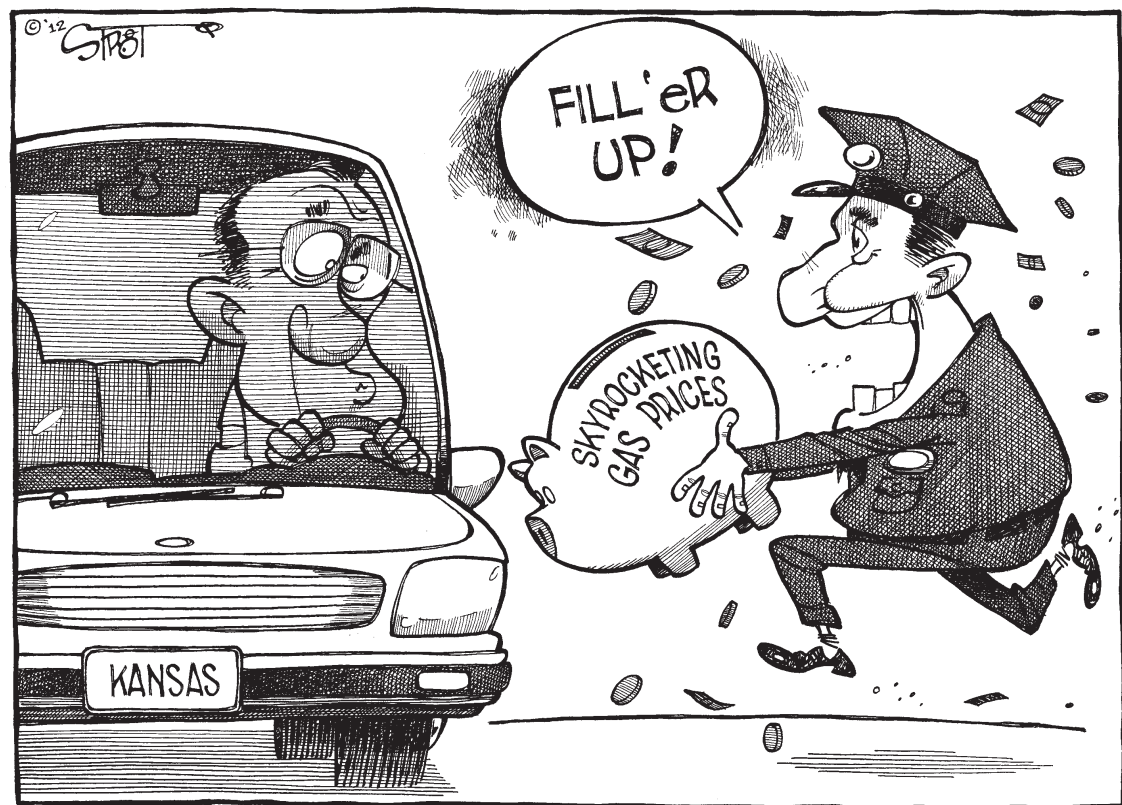
It’s common to have tornadoes in the South in winter months. Storms that bring blizzards to the plains and ski weather to the mountains generate thunderstorms in warmer states.

But in Kansas?

So here’s the deal. Why not just test the tornado warning system the first Monday of every month?

The first test of March, just before Severe Weather Week, usually turns up a few sirens that stopped working over the winter. Why wait? Tornadoes don’t know about Severe Weather Week.

There’s no harm in cranking up the publicity in March, but weird as our weather can be, why take chances with the sirens? Why not be ready? — *Steve Haynes*



Cats provide too much help

It’s so nice to have help making the bed.

Now, I don’t mean just throwing the covers back over things in the morning. I mean putting the mattress pad, fitted sheet, top sheet, two blankets and the comforter on after they’ve been washed each week.

And every week, I have help. Not Steve. He’s almost always able to find some job somewhere else. He hates to make the bed.

But April Alice is always there for me, lying in the middle of the mattress and just daring me to cover her up with the pad. Then she wiggles out while I’m securing the corners and gets ready for the fitted sheet.

By the time I’m up to the blankets, she’s in full killer mode – biting and scratching at each layer as it covers her then slipping out and getting ready for the next.

April is the helpful cat in the family. She’s also always ready to help with any work we do at the dining room table.

Sit down at your portable computer and before too long, she will be hopping up on the table – a total



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
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no-no, and she knows it – and sneaking up to try to get as close to the action as possible.

Believe me, it’s really hard to type with a cat’s head between your hands and the keys.

Sneaking is a specialty of our cats.

I love to read, and when I have the opportunity, I get comfortable in my recliner and dive into my latest mystery novel.

Many times as I start my book, a cat will crawl into my lap and start to purr up a storm. It’s comforting, warm and relaxing. However, it’s also a little unsettling when I come up for air after a chapter or two to find a different cat in my lap and

realize I didn’t even know I had been switched out.

While April is the helpful cat, her son Frank is the lazy one.

He loves the bed. He thinks it’s bedtime long before the sun goes down in the winter. Any time either of us goes upstairs to do anything, Frank is ready for bed.

He runs ahead and jumps in the middle with that expectant air of a cat ready for a nice nap.

If you walk off, he sulks. If you lie down, he curls up right next to you.

By morning, there usually are more cats than people in our bed.

I guess I shouldn’t complain. We could raise St. Bernards.

She needed a little invention

They say “necessity is the mother of invention.” I wish “they” would have been in my kitchen a few nights ago to invent something.

A special young couple in our small Bible study group is moving away. The rest of the group wanted to honor them. So, secretly, we decided to have a surprise party for them after our meeting late Sunday afternoon.

I volunteered to make lasagna. The original plan was to make two pans: one for the adults and one for the kids. While shopping last week, I spotted a very large, disposable aluminum pan made especially for lasagna.

“Perfect,” I thought. “It will be big enough for everyone. I won’t have to make two batches.”

That’s where I should have stopped and rethought my strategy. I should have also taken some measurements. You see, my refrigerator/freezer is a side-by-side, and the refrigerator compartment is not nearly as wide as a combo unit with the freezer on the top or bottom.

It was late Friday night when I finally finished assembling the lasagna. I soon realized that no matter which way I turned the pan, it was not going to fit. What to do? I didn’t have a cooler big enough to hold it, and I didn’t think a box on the front



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
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porch would be safe from pillaging neighborhood cats and dogs. Here’s where Yankee ingenuity came in.

I took the largest trash bag I had and dumped the ice cube canister in it. Then I set it in the bathtub, spread the ice out flat and set the pan of lasagna on top of the ice, pulling the bag up around the pan and tying a knot in the bag. Then, just like when you wrap an ice cream freezer with a blanket for insulation, I wrapped the pan, ice, bag and all with towels. Guess what. It still had ice the next day. I just kept adding ice until it was time to bake. And no one was the wiser. Until now, I guess.

This was the weekend for the statewide Republican caucuses. Jim was speaking on behalf of our favored candidate, sharing his personal opinions. I was going to summarize with a recap of his political platform. The caucus forum only

allows 10 minutes per candidate, and Jim has been a preacher far too long to get any point across in less than 10 minutes.

As it turned out, “our guy” didn’t need any help from us. He won the county and the state handily. Here’s my one bit of political commentary. I don’t care who you vote for, just vote. Because if you don’t cast a ballot, you are voting for the opposition.

-ob-

My next column will be written in Texas before we cross the border into Mexico. Used to be when we traveled, I had to find a fax machine to send my column from. Now, every motel in America has a computer in the lobby. I sit and drum my fingers on the keyboard there, just like I do at home. The only difference: at a motel, I can’t write in my pajamas.

Kansas wants out of No Child

An item of real significance to our state and all of our schools is that last week the deputy commissioner of education, Dr. Diane DeBacker, filed a waiver with the U.S. Department of Education to allow Kansas to opt out of the No Child Left Behind Act.

A waiver would remove the requirement for 100 percent of all tested students to meet proficiency by 2014, and let Kansas set new attainable measures.

I will discuss some of those in future articles after the waiver is attained.

It is not certain we will receive the waiver, but I believe we have an excellent chance.

An issue I was concerned about before coming to Topeka was our state’s ability to export our products.

I discussed this with our commerce director, Pat George – he is from Dodge City and served many years in the Legislature – and feel that he is working hard in that direction.

The federal government has been pushed to open-up new markets for our Kansas products.

In 2011, exports have increased by more than 16 percent over 2010. We are at the second highest level on record, \$11.57 billion of exported products.

Our largest gains were in cereals (101 percent), pharmaceutical products (54 percent) and meats (36 percent).

Our top five export markets are, in order, Canada, Mexico, Japan, China and Nigeria.

I am confident Secretary George is making good progress opening-



Letter from Topeka

By *State Rep. Ward Cassidy*
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up new markets for our products.

Another bit of good news is that Revenue Secretary Nick Jordan reported that the state collected \$29 million more in taxes in February than projected.

He said this is a sign the Kansas economy is recovering and more people are getting jobs.

Since the beginning of this fiscal year in July, tax collections have been \$3.7 billion, about \$32 million more than expected.

There is little in the way of new information regarding KanCare, as much of the details cannot be released by the Brownback Administration because of the nature of the contract negotiations they are involved in.

It prevents them from divulging any details of the proposals made by the health care companies until the contracts are signed.

The process is expected to take until mid to late summer to have the list of the three companies the administration has chosen.

I have heard many concerns about the KanCare plan and have continued to express our concerns with this administration.

It is important as to how this will affect medical providers and clients in our towns.

A reminder – all of the articles I have written this year and my contact information are on my website www.wardcassidy.com. On this website,

I will also have an update on what is happening to the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System and will update the information as the process develops.

Ward Cassidy of St. Francis, a retired school principal and teacher, is the state representative for the 120th District, covering Decatur, Cheyenne, Rawlins, Norton and Phillips counties. Send e-mails to ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov.

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Writer wants new runway built

To the Editor:

Regarding the article in last week’s *Oberlin Herald* (Page 1, Wednesday, Feb. 29) about needing another vote on the airport upgrade,

we have already done that – and it passed.

Letters to the Editor

Git-R-Done!
Jerry Lohofener, Oberlin

Each farmer feeds 144 people right now

To the Editor:

You, I and 142 other people ate today because of one American farmer. We officially recognize our farmers and all they do to make our lives better on March 8, National Ag Day.

Farmers not only produce food, fiber and fuel, they contribute to a strong economy. In fact, the total impact of agriculture and agribusinesses account for 20 percent of our state’s economy, according to Kansas Inc.

The role of farmers will become even more critical with the exploding world population. We reached 7 billion people in 2011. The United Nations forecasts that world population will reach 9 billion by 2050 – and that a farmer will have to produce 70 percent more food than he does today.

I’m proud to be part of a Kansas family farm that has helped feed the world for five generations. We are also raising the next generation of farmers and cherish every planting,

every birth of our livestock and every harvest we spend together.

Be part of Kansas agriculture, if even just for one day. Take a drive in the country with your family, for instance. There’s no prettier green than wheat fields waking from winter dormancy.

And wave if you see a farmer. I guarantee he or she will wave back.

Happy Ag Day!
Lesley Schmidt, Wichita
A Kansas Agri-Woman