

POCOLA DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINE

SUBJECT	EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM ACTIVATION		
NUMBER:	7.000	EFFECTIVE DATE:	
SCHEDULED REVIEW DATE:		ISSUE DATE:	
DATE REVIEWED:		REVISION DATE:	
APPROVED BY:			

I. PURPOSE

- A. The purpose of this guideline shall be to establish common guidelines for the activation of the emergency alert system sirens (EAS) throughout the Town of Pocola. The town of Pocola is approximately 30 square miles and reaches from Backbone Mountain on the southern limits and nearly to Zero Street on the northern limits.
- B. The intent of this guideline is to assist in decisions made by citizens when the EAS has been activated. This guideline is not intended to remove Pocola’s responsibility to alert or warn its citizens if a situation occurs outside the parameters of this guideline.
- C. The EAS is only one component of the public emergency notification system. Others include:
 - 1. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) All-Hazards Weather Radio
 - 2. National Weather Service (NWS)
 - 3. NWSChat
 - 4. Law Enforcement
 - 5. Fire Department
 - 6. Emergency Management
 - 7. Text Notification Networks
 - 8. Broadcast Media

Sirens are used to alert citizens of an imminent hazard and to prompt them to take immediate action to find shelter, and, once there, seek additional information on the threat to life and property.

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- D. The goal of the Pocola Department of Emergency Management is to develop common guidelines for activating the EAS throughout the Town of Pocola to reduce confusion which would result in a delayed public response during an emergency.

Establishing this common guideline will allow communities to partner in public education campaigns regarding the EAS, develop alternative methods for receiving severe weather warnings and information, and improve the overall public emergency notification system.

Our mission is to help save lives and property with these guidelines. It will take the assistance of our citizens to develop their own situational awareness and take appropriate personal responsibility during times of inclement weather.

II. DEFINITIONS

- A. **Activation:** Refers to the activation of the EAS in an actual severe weather event.
- B. **Monthly Testing:** Refers to the monthly audible testing of the EAS.
- C. **EAS:** Emergency Alert System (Storm Sirens)
- D. **NWS:** National Weather Service
- E. **Severe Thunderstorm Watch:** Issued by the NWS when conditions are favorable for the development of severe thunderstorms in and close to the watch area. A severe thunderstorm by definition is a thunderstorm that produces one inch hail or larger in diameter and/or winds equal to or exceeding fifty-eight (58) miles per hour. During the watch, individuals should review severe thunderstorm safety rules and be prepared to move to a place of safety if threatening weather approaches.
- F. **Severe Thunderstorm Warning:** Issued when either a severe thunderstorm is indicated by Doppler radar or a trained storm spotter reports a thunderstorm producing hail one inch or larger in diameter and/or wind speeds equal to or exceeding fifty-eight (58) miles per hour; therefore, individuals in the warned area should seek a safe place of shelter immediately. Severe thunderstorms can produce tornadoes with little or no advance warning. Severe thunderstorms can occur without a watch being in place.
- G. **Tornado Watch:** Issued by the NWS when conditions are favorable for the development of tornadoes in and close to the watch area. During the watch, individuals should review tornado safety rules and be prepared to move to a place of safety if threatening weather approaches.
- H. **Tornado Warning:** Issued when a tornado is indicated by Doppler radar or sighted by trained storm spotters; therefore, people in the warned area should seek a safe place of shelter immediately. Tornado Warnings can be issued without a Tornado Watch being already in effect. Tornadoes can occur without a watch being in place.

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- I. **Tornado Emergency:** An exceedingly rare tornado warning issued when there is a severe threat to human life and catastrophic damage from an imminent or ongoing tornado. This tornado warning is reserved for situations when a reliable source confirms a tornado, or there is clear radar evidence of the existence of a damaging tornado, such as the observation of debris

III. EAS ACTIVATION GUIDELINES

- A. The following are factors to consider as minimum EAS activation guidelines:
 - 1. The NWS issues a tornado warning and the Pocola area is located within the tornado warning polygon.
 - 2. Trained storm spotters have reported a tornado in the jurisdiction or in a neighboring jurisdiction that has the potential to directly affect Pocola.
 - 3. Other emergency as directed by the community’s designated emergency management officials.
 - 4. The EAS will be activated by the Communications Center at the Pocola Police Department with authorization from the Director or Deputy Director of Emergency Management. The EAS can also be activated in vehicle by the Director of Emergency Management or the Police Sargent.
 - 5. 70 M.P.H. Wind Speeds
 - 6. 2” in diameter hail

IV. NOTIFICATION OF EAS ACTIVATION

- A. Pocola Police Department Communications Center should make external notifications to neighboring jurisdictions as soon as possible indicating that the EAS has been activated. This can be accomplished via telephone, public safety radio, or 911 interoperable terminals. During Amateur Radio ARES© net activations, the notification should be made via the amateur radio SKYWARN net in progress or any other means available. The purpose of this notification is to allow other jurisdictions to have the knowledge of the impending tornado warning and the possibility for serious physical injuries, death, and significant property damage to Pocola.
- B. Agencies to notify may include:
 - 1. LeFlore County Sheriff’s Department
 - 2. LeFlore County 911
 - 3. Arkoma Police Department

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4. Spiro Police Department

5. Poteau Police Department

V. MONTHLY EAS TESTING

A. This guideline recommends that the Town of Pocola conduct their monthly EAS testing at 12:00 P.M. (noon) on the second Wednesday of each month. This testing will be postponed if there is a chance of inclement weather on the regularly scheduled testing date. *Examples of weather that would not permit the testing of the EAS are: thunderstorms in the area, temperatures below 32°F, or any other criteria that the manufacturer recommends the sirens not be sounded.* This test specifically refers to sounding the audible sound of the EAS for the community to hear.

B. Other factors which may postpone testing may include:

1. Overcast sky.
2. Severe weather watch in effect.
3. An ongoing emergency exists and the test may cause an alarm.
4. Test date falls upon a holiday.
5. Emergency Management Director or Deputy Director deems the test inappropriate.

C. Should the scheduled test not occur, it will be rescheduled to the following Wednesday until the test has been completed for that month.

VI. UNACCEPTABLE PRACTICES

A. An “all-clear” tone only adds confusion to the public. The EAS is simply to notify citizens, who are outdoors, that a hazardous severe weather event is approaching. Once the EAS has been activated all persons should seek a safe place of shelter and, once there, find further information about the severe weather threat. Using the EAS to signify that there is no threat diminishes the value of the EAS. There are other methods (NOAA All-Hazards Weather Radio) for the public to learn that the threat has passed, so there is no reason for sounding an “all-clear”.

B. Some cities sound their sirens for warnings in neighboring areas as an added level of protection. This unnecessary sounding adds no value and only causes confusion when individuals tune in for more information and find that they are not under any weather warning. Other areas alert for any severe thunderstorm warning issued during a tornado watch. A large majority of severe thunderstorm warnings do not produce tornadoes.

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- C. Pocola Department of Emergency Management understands that you're concerned about emergencies where the EAS is activated. When activation is done outside of a NWS Warning and the reason is not communicated to the public, unexpected messages may be delivered. Clear communication is critical for why the EAS is activated each time it is.

VII. NWSCHAT

- A. NWSChat allows notification to the NWS, media, and neighboring jurisdictions immediately, which allows a single unified message to be disseminated and provides the confirmation that the public needs to hear in order to respond. NWSChat is an instant messaging program utilized by the NWS operational personnel to share critical warning decision expertise and other types of significant weather information essential to the NWS's mission of saving lives and property.

This information is exchanged in real-time with the media and emergency management personnel, all of whom play a key role in communicating the NWS's hazardous weather messages to the public.

NWS partners can use NWSChat as an efficient means of seeking clarifications and enhancements to the communication stream originating from the NWS during a fast paced significant weather or hydrologic event.

In order to participate in NWS Chat, you must meet at least one of the following standards:

1. Be a member of the emergency management community (EM): Members of the EM community include public safety officials who serve as employees or contract agents of a government agency at the federal, state, local, or tribal level and are charged with protecting the public from hazards that are influenced by weather or weather-related events. Other members of this community include: safety and emergency personnel from universities or other large entities with large populations, people whose roles are functionally equivalent to the public safety officials described above, and Skywarn Net Control Operators, such as Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES) and Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES).
2. Be a government partner of a NWS office: This includes government partners with missions that require close coordination with the NWS. Government partners include (but not limited to) the FAA, and water and land management officials.

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3. Be a member of the electronic media: Members of the electronic media are parties and contract agents of parties who:
 - a. Have a need to actively participate in discussions with NWS Forecast Offices on imminent weather or other hazards, and
 - b. Operate systems that routinely and rapidly relay weather and water watches, advisories, warnings, and forecast information to a significant part of the population served by an NWS office via electronic information distribution such as radio, television, internet, cellular, and other wireless means.
4. The website to gain access to the NWSChat system is:
<https://nwschat.weather.gov>

VIII. STORMREADY (COURTESY OF NWS)

- A. Many laws and regulations exist to help local emergency managers deal with hazardous material spills, search and rescue operations, medical crises, etc., but there are relatively few uniformly recognized guidelines that address dealing with the specifics of hazardous weather response operations. The NWS recognized this need and designed StormReady— a program to help communities and counties implement procedures to reduce the potential for disastrous, weather-related consequences.

StormReady helps communities attain a new level of preparedness and mitigation awareness for extreme weather-related events. StormReady communities have a strong commitment to putting in place infrastructure and systems that will save lives and protect property when hazardous weather strikes. By participating in StormReady, local agencies can earn recognition for their jurisdiction by meeting guidelines established by the NWS in partnership with federal, state, and local emergency management professionals.

The StormReady program is intended to:

1. Improve the timeliness and effectiveness of hazardous weather warnings for the public.
2. Provide detailed and clear recommendations by which local emergency managers may establish or improve effective hazardous weather operations.
3. Help local emergency managers justify costs and purchases related to supporting their hazardous weather-related program.

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4. Reward local hazardous-weather mitigation programs that have achieved a desired performance level.
5. Provide a means of acquiring additional Community Rating System points assigned by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).
6. Provide an “image incentive” to counties, cities, and towns that can identify them as being StormReady.
7. Encourage better hazardous weather preparedness programs in jurisdictions surrounding StormReady communities and counties.

StormReady is a voluntary program and is offered to provide guidance and incentive to officials who want to improve their respective hazardous weather operations. **NOTE:** *Implied or explicit references to “guidelines” are made only with regard to the voluntary participants in the StormReady program and should not be construed as being state or federal mandates.*

IX. ALTERNATIVE WARNING METHODS

Title	Operating System	Price
iMapWeather Radio	iPhone/Android	\$4.99
Weather Alert USA	iPhone	\$9.99
CodeRED Mobile Alert	iPhone	FREE
Weather@US: Weather Alerts	iPhone	\$0.99
The Weather Channel	Multiple	FREE
RadarScope	iPhone/Android	\$9.99
WeatherAlerts	iPhone	\$4.99
Simple Weather Alert	Android	FREE
OnGuard Weather Alerts	Android	\$1.99
Storm Chase Buddy	Android	\$2.99
Emergency Alert	Android	\$1.10
TorWarn Weather Alerts Pro	Android	\$1.99
Active Alerts Weather Alerts	Android	\$1.96
The Weather Network	Blackberry	FREE
BeWeather	Blackberry	\$6.99
StormWatch	Blackberry	\$6.99
e-Mobile Weather	Blackberry	\$13.99
WeatherBug	Multiple	FREE
AccuWeather	Multiple	FREE

In addition, short message service (SMS) text, e-mail, and voice notification systems are also available to communities. These include, but not limited to Nixle, CodeRed, Global Connect, Alert Now, TextCaster, etc...

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X. Functional Needs Population

- A. These populations may include, but not limited to the blind, other visually-impaired, deaf, other hearing impaired, non-ambulatory, and other functional needs citizens.
- B. A functional needs weather radio for the deaf or hearing impaired may be found at: <http://www.nssl.noaa.gov/edu/safety/specialneeds.html>
- C. Engage by E-View: receive 30-second ASL videos with news and events for the deaf along with emergency alerts that vibrate and flash on your smartphone: <http://www.engagebyview.com>
- D. The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), and its newspaper service for the blind, NFB-NEWSLINE, collaborated with AccuWeather, an online weather information service, to provide emergency weather alerts to blind and print-disabled subscribers throughout America. NFB-NEWSLINE is a free audible information access service that provides over 300 newspapers and magazines to the blind. The AccuWeather information service will be offered on NFB-NEWSLINE, giving blind and print-disabled individuals instant access to emergency weather alerts.

NFB_ NEWSLINE is a free audible newspaper and magazine reading service that provides information to blind and print-disabled individuals over the telephone, online, and on iPhone. For more information or to register visit www.nfbnewsonline.org, nfbnewslines@nfb.org, or call 866-504-7300.

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