

# How to stay safe in bad weather

## What does that siren mean?

With severe weather season in full swing, the residents of Norton County are on the lookout for potentially dangerous weather. Though weather information is readily accessible through television and internet, residents also rely heavily on community siren systems to notify them of severe weather, especially tornados.

According to Norton County Emergency Management Coordinator Justina Smith, the county operates on an enhanced 911 emergency alert system. The system runs through local cable television and is used for severe weather, emergency snow routes, chemical spills, downed power lines, major fires, missing persons location, dangerous individuals in the area and any other threats to public safety.

The county also uses a Total Notify alert system, which allows county residents to register home and cellular phone numbers to receive phone calls for emergency notification.

The county's outdoor siren system sounds a variety of tones, depending on the location of the siren and type of emergency.

For the city of Almena, the tornado siren is a 3-minute continuous tone. Shorter tones represent fires and the siren is tested at 7 a.m., noon and 6 p.m. each day.

The city of Lenora also uses a 3-minute continuous tone for tornado warnings and shorter tones are for fire notification.

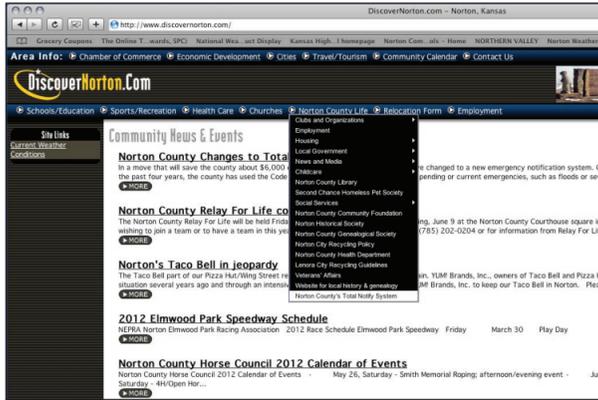
The Lenora siren is tested each Monday at 6 p.m.

Norton's city siren uses eight up-and-down tones for tornado warnings and one and two-tone sirens are for fires. The Norton siren is tested each Monday at 6 p.m.

None of the communities in Norton County have "all clear" sirens to be used after a tornado siren has been issued. Smith explained that the county is unable to use an all-clear siren because of the types of systems that are in place.

"We can only program a limited number of alert types into the siren system," she said. "We don't have the capacity to program an all-clear into the systems, so we're asking residents to use common sense for safety during and after severe weather events."

Though the community sirens can be an effective warning system for tornados, Smith encouraged all citizens to keep informed about weather as much as possible, especially those who live too far away from towns to hear the sirens. Everyone is encouraged to register for the county's Total Notify system, which can be done through [www.discovernorton.com](http://www.discovernorton.com)



norton.com by clicking on the "Total Notify" link. The system will allow citizens to receive phone alerts when severe weather becomes a safety threat.

Smith also urged everyone to purchase a NOAA weather radio, which issues alerts of severe weather and potential tornados. In addition, local radio and television stations often issue alerts about severe weather. Most of all, though, everyone in the county should be using their best judgment to be aware of potentially dangerous weather.

"We live in northwest Kansas and we are familiar with severe weather," Smith said. "There are more levels of notification than ever before and the number one safety tip is to use good judgment and be aware of what's going on with the weather."

## Are you prepared?

The key to safety in severe weather is preparedness. Each home should have a safety kit assembled for use in the event of a weather emergency, such as a tornado or severe thunderstorm. The kit should contain the following items, plus any additional items that may be necessary for pets, children or people with special needs.

- Non-perishable food items and water
- Manual can opener if your kit contains canned food
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Change of clothing for each family member
- First-aid kit
- Prescription medications
- Sun block
- Flashlight and batteries
- NOAA weather radio
- Set of car and house keys
- Whistle to signal for help
- Highway map that marks the counties to follow the storm
- Identification and a credit card or cash
- Any specific items you may need for children such as diapers or formula

In addition to a safety kit, each family needs to develop a disaster plan to be utilized in the event of severe weather.

**Gather information about hazards:** Contact your local National Weather Service office, emergency management or civil defense office and American Red Cross chapter. Find out what kinds of disasters could occur and how you should respond. Learn about your community's warning signals and evacuation plans.

**Meet with your family and create a plan:** Discuss the information you have gathered. Pick two places to meet, a spot outside your home for an emergency such as a fire, and a place away from your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Choose an out-of-state friend as your family check-in contact for everyone to call if the family gets separated. Discuss what you would if advised to evacuate.

**Implement your plan:** Post emergency phone numbers, install safety features in your home, inspect your home for potential hazards, have your family learn basic safety measures, such as CPR and first aid, teach children how and when to call 911, keep enough supplies in your home to meet your needs for at least three days, assemble disaster supplies and store supplies in sturdy, easily carried containers and keep important family documents in a waterproof container.

**Practice and maintain your plan:** Ask questions to make sure everyone in the family remembers meeting place, phone numbers and safety rules. Conduct drills, test smoke detectors and test and recharge fire extinguishers.

## Where are you during severe weather?

**In a house with a basement:** Avoid windows. Get in the basement and under some kind of sturdy protection (heavy table or work bench), or cover yourself with a mattress or sleeping bag.

**In a house with no basement, a dorm, or an apartment:** Avoid windows. Go to the lowest floor, small center room (like a bathroom or closet), under a stairwell, or in an interior hallway with no windows. Crouch as low as possible to the floor, facing down.

**In an office building, hospital, nursing home or skyscraper:** Go directly to an enclosed, windowless area in the center of the building -- away from glass and on the lowest floor possible. Then, crouch down and cover your head. Interior stairwells are usually good places to take shelter, and if not crowded, allow you to get to a lower level quickly. Stay off the elevators; you could be trapped in them if the power is lost.

**In a mobile home:** Get out! Even if your home is tied down, it is not as safe as an underground shelter

or permanent, sturdy building. Go to one of those shelters, or to a nearby permanent structure, using your tornado evacuation plan. Most tornados can destroy even tied-down mobile homes; and it is best not to play the low odds that yours will make it.

**At school:** Follow the drill! Go to the interior hall or room in an orderly way as you are told. Crouch low, head down, and protect the back of your head with your arms. Stay away from windows and large open rooms like gyms and auditoriums.

**In a car or truck:** Vehicles are extremely risky in a tornado. There is no safe option when caught in a tornado in a car, just slightly less-dangerous ones. If the tornado is visible, far away, and the traffic is light, you may be able to drive out of its path by moving at right angles to the tornado. Seek shelter in a sturdy building, or underground if possible. If you are caught by extreme winds or flying debris, park the car as quickly and safely as possible -- out of the traffic lanes. Stay in the

car with the seat belt on. Put your head down below the windows; cover your head with your hands and a blanket, coat, or other cushion if possible.

**In the open outdoors:** If possible, seek shelter in a sturdy building. If not, lie flat and face-down on low ground, protecting the back of your head with your arms. Get as far away from trees and cars as you can; they may be blown onto you in a tornado.

**In a shopping mall or large store:** Do not panic. Watch for others. Move as quickly as possible to an interior bathroom, storage room or other small enclosed area, away from windows.

**In a church or theater:** Do not panic. If possible, move quickly but orderly to an interior bathroom or hallway, away from windows. Crouch face-down and protect your head with your arms. If there is no time to do that, get under the seats or pews, protecting your head with your arms or hands.

## 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?



## Kansas Insurance Department

Sandy Praeger, Commissioner of Insurance

[www.ksinsurance.org](http://www.ksinsurance.org)

paid for with taxes or public funds

### 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.

**PRAIRIE LAND**  
Electric Cooperative, Inc.

**Think "Safety First" After Storms**

**Consider all downed power lines and hanging wires ENERGIZED and DANGEROUS!**

**BE ASSURED**  
The Norton County Hospital will be there in Case of an Emergency

**NCH**

The Norton County Hospital has implemented a plan which would become effective once notified by the Emergency Preparedness Team. Norton County Hospital would continue to function in a full or limited capacity to offer:

**EMERGENCY SERVICES**

- Primary Triage - Emergency Care
- Secondary Triage - Advanced Care
- Walking Wounded Care - Non Critical Care
- LAB WORK •X-RAY •LIMITED ELECTIVE SURGERIES FOR MORE CRITICAL CARE UNTIL CRISIS IS OVER

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