

SEVERE WEATHER TORNADO GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL CITIZENS

At a recent Ephrata Borough Council meeting, the question was asked by a citizen if outdoor sirens are used to make people aware of severe weather. Sirens in Lancaster County are utilized to make emergency responders aware of a fire or emergency call, not severe weather.

Citizens can receive severe weather warnings directly from the National Weather Service through a tone alerted Weather radio which is available for the home at a reasonable fee. People can also set up apps in their cell phones to receive emergency weather information and also use the apps of local TV stations to get warnings as they are occurring. In some cases with tornadoes, the warning for a tornado may be received only 3 to 9 minutes prior to the events. Warnings for severe thunderstorms and floods may be 15 to 30 minutes prior to the event. People have to react quickly.

Randall Gockley, Ephrata Borough EMA Coordinator is urging all citizens to have a plan and be prepared for severe weather. "In a tornado or high wind event, people need to go to the lowest level of their home and stay away from windows which may create flying glass. People in an apartment or home without a basement should go to an interior closet, bathroom or hallway. Get down on your knees and elbows with your hands or pillow covering your head." The other option is to make arrangements in advance to go to a neighbor's home or business with a basement, if time permits.

In the aftermath of the storm, check for injuries and only leave the building if conditions allow. Be aware of live wires that may be down and building collapse is possible.

If outdoors, be especially aware of lightning. If you can see the lightning in the distance seek shelter, as lightning can strike from as far as 10 miles away. Do not wait to go indoors until the storm is on top of you. Seek safety sooner than later.

Many areas of northern Lancaster County are flood prone. Over the past 12 years, 1 person on average has died every 2 years due to flooding. Do not try to drive or walk through flood waters.

Rushing water as little as 8 to 12 inches is enough to knock a person over or to float a vehicle

downstream. Almost nightly, media news has footage and tales of people being rushed away. Gockley reminds everyone “To turn around and not drown”.

People need to understand the difference between a Weather “Watch” (the situation might happen) and a “Warning” (the situation is happening). Watches may be issued hours in advance allowing people to be aware in ample time and keep an eye to the sky.

During or in the aftermath of a storm, people should call 911 if help is needed. The emergency Services will prioritize the calls and respond. There may be a delay since they may have multiple calls for assistance.

Emergency officials will designate shelters for people to go to in the aftermath. This may be a local fire station, school or church. If needed, officials will work with the American Red Cross to establish a Mass Care Center to meet the safety and temporary housing needs of citizens.

Gockley stated it is imperative for families to discuss in advance what to do if there is a weather emergency. If any citizens have questions, Gockley can be contacted at ephrataOEM@ephrataboro.org or at 717-466-9050.