



KENT COUNTY SHERIFF DEPARTMENT
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Tornado/High Winds Warning Sirens to Start Testing in April
April 16-22 is Michigan Severe Weather Awareness Week

GRAND RAPIDS – In 2016, the August 20 tornado outbreak across West Michigan caused over five million dollars in damage. The National Weather Service determined that six tornadoes touched down in a matter of hours, including two EF0 tornadoes in Grandville, Wyoming and Grand Rapids. The State of Michigan was hit by 16 tornadoes last year, just slightly higher than the average 15 per year. Kent County has a system of sirens to alert residents of high winds or tornadoes. Starting Friday, April 7, 2017 and continuing on the first Friday of every month at 12:00 noon through October, tornado alarm testing will be heard in Kent County homes and businesses.

It is important to plan in advance for disasters to know how you and your family will get to a safe place, how to contact each other and what to do in different situations. “Traffic was a dilemma in the initial hours after the tornadoes hit Kent County last August,” said Jack Stewart, Kent County Emergency Management Coordinator. “Trees and debris in roadways made getting around difficult. Determine a location where you will meet your family during an emergency, both near your house and further away, in case your neighborhood streets are closed.”

If a disaster occurs, it may be easier to make a phone call to a designated out-of-town contact, as phone lines may be overwhelmed. Make sure that person is aware that he or she is the designated contact. Pet owners should have a disaster plan for pets as well. This is a great time to review severe weather plans, refresh supplies and make sure preparations are complete. Check flashlights and stock up on fresh batteries. Homes should have enough fresh drinking water and canned food items for three days, a can opener, an all-weather radio, and a first aid kit.

If you don't hear the sirens April 7, 2017 at noon, please contact your local township or city office. Be vigilant whenever severe weather is in the forecast. While no location is completely safe from a tornado or severe thunderstorm, it is important to seek all possible protection. For more about severe weather, go to http://www.michigan.gov/documents/msp/SWApaket_554981_7.pdf.

Smartphone apps are available that will provide notification of weather watches and warnings. Severe weather **watch** means the potential exists for the development of storms/tornadoes, so be mindful of changing conditions. Severe weather **warning** mean that storms are imminent or occurring. Move indoors to a place of safety. If it is a Tornado Warning, take shelter in a location on the lowest level of the building, such as the basement, or in a small, windowless room at the innermost part of the building.

(PLEASE NOTE: While some communities in Michigan plan to test their severe weather alerts on Wednesday, April 19, at 1:00 p.m., Kent County will test sirens on the first Friday in April, as has been a long-standing policy in the County. We encourage businesses owners, school officials and families to set aside April 19 as a day to review emergency plans and procedures.)

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