



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Champaign County EMA Urges Planning for Severe Weather

Severe Weather Preparedness Week is March 4-8, 2024

CHAMPAIGN, IL – The Champaign County Emergency Management Agency (CCEMA) is urging residents to prepare for severe weather as part of Severe Weather Preparedness week, March 4-8, 2024. Illinois had the most tornadoes of any U.S. state last year with 121. These storms resulted in four fatalities, 54 injuries and caused millions of dollars in property damage. While people cannot stop severe thunderstorms, lightning, or tornadoes from happening, there are steps that everyone can take to minimize the impacts of severe weather on our lives and our families. According to the National Weather Service (NWS), the following precautions can be taken to prepare for severe weather:

1. **STAY INFORMED.** Monitor a weather alert radio, local radio and TV broadcasts, websites, or weather apps on computers and smart phones. DON'T just rely on one method - especially storm sirens - which are NOT designed to be heard indoors by everyone. Have multiple ways to receive information.
2. **HAVE AN EMERGENCY PLAN.** A plan is essential to keeping yourself and those around you safe. Designate places to go to seek safe shelter from a tornado or severe thunderstorm. Pick two places to meet in case you are separated from your family or co-workers. While traveling or when away from home, know the names of the locations you are visiting - especially county and city names.
3. **HAVE AN EMERGENCY SUPPLY KIT.** Some storms have the power to cause power outages that can last for several days. Having an emergency supply kit on-hand will help you cope with the outage while crews work to restore services. A basic emergency supply kit includes:

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- Bottled water
 - Non-perishable food
 - Flashlights and extra batteries
 - Extra clothing and blankets
 - An extra set of keys and cash
 - Medications and a first aid kit
 - Personal hygiene items
 - Pet supplies
 - A weather alert radio or portable AM/FM radio
4. **PREPARE YOUR HOME FOR AN EMERGENCY.** Spend time before an emergency to ensure that you and your home are ready to withstand a storm. This preparation looks like:
- **Training.** Learn how to use a fire extinguisher, how to administer CPR, and how to turn off the electricity, gas, and water supplies in your home.
 - **Inspection.** Inspect your home for potential hazards such as weakened trees or limbs, cracked windows, or worn roofing.
 - **Storm proofing.** When you build a new structure or renovate an existing one, there are ways to prevent wind damage to roofs, upper floors, and garages. Consider reinforcement of structural elements, such as rafters, trusses, walls, and doors.

Additionally, this year, CCEMA has updated the protocols for warning sirens in the C-U Metro area, which includes the Cities of Champaign, Urbana, the University of Illinois, and the Village of Savoy. Sirens will now be activated for thunderstorm warnings including the term “destructive” in their NWS description. The term destructive warning was used for the storms that left considerable damage to the community on June 29, 2023. The criteria for a threat of **destructive** damage include hail measuring at least 2.75-inch diameter (baseball-sized) and/or winds meeting or exceeding 80 miles per hour. Warnings with this tag will also automatically activate a Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) on smartphones within the warned area. Other areas in the county that have update their siren protocols include the Villages of Fisher, Tolono, Sidney and Pesotum.

The Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) and the NWS have developed a Severe Weather Preparedness Guide which provides information about tornadoes, severe storms, lightning, and flooding, along with recommended actions to take before, during, and after each of these weather events. It is available on the Ready Illinois website at ready.illinois.gov. The NWS, Lincoln also has Severe Weather Safety information available online at weather.gov/ilx/. For local weather safety information, follow Champaign County EMA on Facebook (facebook.com/ChampaignEMA) and Twitter/X (twitter.com/ChampCoEMA).

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