

# Spring means tornados

## County readies warning system

As winter reluctantly gives way to spring another season is in sight — the tornado season.

Oakland County is gearing up for it, though. By April 7, 90 tornado warning sirens will be connected on a central line with the National Weather Service at Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

The tornado season begins in March and extends through the summer. The season peaks in June and July in the Great Lakes area. Twisters occur when warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico comes in contact with cooler, drier air from the North.

In the past, 70 sirens located around the county had to be turned on individually. All the new sirens will be interconnected and can be turned on simultaneously by the National Weather Service.

Oakland County appears to be in a common tornado path.

"Whenever we have an official warning," said Gary Canfield, the county's disaster control coordinator, "all they have to do is push a button and sirens throughout the county will go off."

"If for some reason the weather service does not have a sighting, a direct hotline has been installed between them and the sheriff's office. The warning can also be given that way in a matter of seconds," he said.

COUNTY AND WEATHER service officials see the new warning system as a marked improvement.

Oakland County's old system was backed up by television and radio announcements. Many officials, however, discount the effectiveness of broadcast bulletins.

According to published reports, National Weather Service meteorologists think television and radio warnings give people a false sense of security. According to the National Weather Service, "There is a minimum delay of five minutes between the time of an official report and wide dissemination. More likely, it would take 10 minutes to get the word to commercial stations."



From serenity to shambles. A tornado swept through West Bloomfield in March 1976, leaving behind it a trail of debris and destruction. A new warning system reportedly will be able to alert Oakland County of a tornado more quickly and more efficiently than the patchwork system which existed in 1976.

Under the old system, it would be possible for a tornado to touch down and wind its vicious path of destruction before word of the sighting could be widely broadcast.

OAKLAND COUNTY's new system will be improved over the next four years by the addition of 100 more warning sirens.

The program will cost about \$1 million. Half the funds will come from the federal government and Oakland County. Local governments will split the remaining costs.

When the entire 190-siren system is finished, 96 per cent of the county's population will be within range of one of the sirens.

THE CENTRALIZED system, when activated, will sound a single, steady three-minute blast. Another signal — a warbling tone whose pitch rises and falls — could be started by the federal government in case of nuclear attack. To avoid confusion, there will be no "all clear" signals sounded by the new system. "All clear" announcements will be made over radio and television.

MICHIGAN, contrary to popular belief, has one of the nation's worst records for tornado deaths. It has the third-highest average number of tornado deaths a year.

Since 1950, there have been 391 confirmed tornadoes in the state and 227 people have died.

The new, centralized warning system is a response to a March 1976 tornado which touched down in West Bloomfield Township and Farmington Hills killing one person and causing damage estimated in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

THE WORST outbreak of tornados in the 20th century occurred on a balmy

April day only four years ago.

From April 3, 1974 to April 4, some 148 tornados smashed through Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, New York, West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina.

That outbreak has been recorded as the most destructive in America's history. More than 6,000 persons were injured, 315 persons were killed and damage was estimated at \$600 million.

More persons, approximately 800 in all, died in the "Great Tornado Outbreak" of Feb. 19, 1884 when an estimated 60 twisters ripped through the South.

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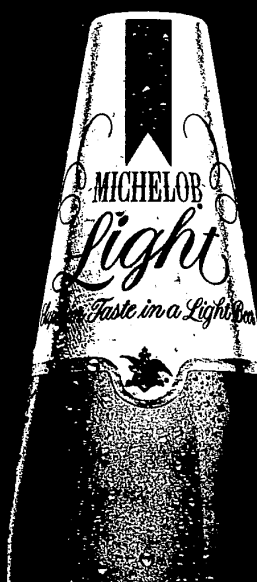
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