

Guard against tornado threat

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"Tone alert receivers" are needed to receive the information. Those who have such receivers include police and fire department dispatchers, school systems, some larger businesses and some individuals.

A communications console in the office links ambulances to various hospitals in the county. The console has disaster operation frequencies that allow for communication with hospitals, police departments and others.

A radar screen in the office indicates weather conditions for southeastern Michigan.

"This is exactly what you see on TV," Phelps said. The radar system covers the area, extending beyond Lansing and north into the thumb area beyond Port Huron. It extends toward Fort Wayne, Ind., and to Cleveland to the south.

The county also operates a tornado warning siren system. A steady three-minute siren sound means a tornado warning is in effect. The county has 136 such sirens, covering approximately 90 percent of the population.

"People are still wanting sirens, they're still asking for sirens and our system is growing," Phelps said. Decisions to put in sirens are made by local

units of government; both Farmington and Farmington Hills have sirens.

THE DISASTER Control staff also works with a volunteer group that helps in spotting severe weather conditions.

"They send 50 to 100 people to the field, to watch the skies," Phelps said. "Their primary purpose is to provide communication services to government during emergencies." The volunteers work with ham radios.

The Disaster Control office is in the basement of the county's Law Enforcement Complex and is supervised by

Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy.

"We're down in the basement for a purpose, so that we're not affected by the severe weather," Phelps said.

If a nuclear bomb were dropped, Oakland County government officials would gather at the office. The Disaster Control Division spends most of its time dealing with more immediate concerns, including natural disasters and manmade disasters, such as the release of hazardous materials into the environment.

"The priorities are what's going to affect Oakland County the most," Phelps said.

How Oakland warning system works

Local tornado warnings are issued by the Detroit office of the National Weather Service when a tornado is sighted or is strongly indicated by radar.

When such a warning is issued, it's important to take shelter immediately. In a home, the basement offers the best protection.

"Don't go down to the point that's under the kitchen," said Paul Phelps, division manager for the county's Division of EMS/Disaster Control. If a tornado were to hit the house, heavy kitchen appliances could fall into the basement area.

In the basement, it's a good idea to seek shelter under the stairs or under a heavy piece of furniture, such as a work bench.

Heavy furniture can also be used for some protection in homes without basements. Residents of homes without basements should seek shelter in the center of the home on the lowest floor in a small area, such as a closet or bathroom.

"If you're in a mobile home, do not stay there," Phelps said. Mobile homes are too light to withstand a tornado's force; for that reason, mobile home

residents should seek shelter in a more substantial structure.

If no such structure is available, it's better to leave the mobile home and seek shelter in a ditch or ravine.

"EVEN IF you're in an open field, it's better than a mobile home," he said.

Drivers caught out in such weather should abandon their cars immediately. "If you're in a car, get out of the car and get in a ditch," Phelps said. Drivers should lie flat in the nearest ditch, ravine or culvert and should use their hands to shield their head.

At work or at school, it's important to avoid areas with glass. Interior hallways or small rooms on the lowest floor offer the best protection.

Gov. James Blanchard has designated the last week in March as Michigan Tornado Safety Week. As part of the week's activities, Oakland County will activate the tornado warning siren system at 1:30 p.m. March 28.

Area school systems will conduct tornado drills at that time, Phelps said. "We would like other people to do that, too," he said. "We hope they will take this time to think about tornado

safety and to actually test their tornado safety plans.

"We want to urge people and agen-

cies to become aware of tornado dangers and the safety procedures to follow."

Youth Hostel sponsors feature on sailing

Lovers of sailing and worldwide travel will be treated to an extraordinary show as "Sallorama '85," John Biddle's 29th annual feature-length film of wind-powered delights comes to Ford Auditorium at 8:30 p.m. Friday, March 29.

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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

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