

Public Abstract

First Name:Nicholas

Middle Name:William

Last Name:Ebner

Adviser's First Name:Tony

Adviser's Last Name:Lupo

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

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Title:A Study of Emergency Management Policy Regarding the Use of Tornado Sirens during Severe Weather in the State of Missouri

In many Missouri counties, guidelines and procedures regarding when to warn the public are inconsistent. After the media, emergency management directors and tornado sirens are the largest source and fastest way of informing the public of impending severe weather with the capability of producing tornadoes. With inconsistencies from county to county in Missouri and a lack of oversight by the state, uncertain and unregulated policies can cause citizens to be confused as to the specific meaning of these sirens. These variations in policy can range from who has responsibility over siren activation to the circumstances in which sirens are sounded. It is well documented that citizens have become desensitized to tornado sirens based on the frequent number of soundings that have proven either to be a false alarm or siren activation provoked by other non-tornadic weather events. This occurs because many counties use their tornado sirens for reasons other than to alert citizens specifically of the immediate threat of tornadoes.

Using a survey and archival research to gather information such as the jurisdiction policies on who activates sirens and the activation guidelines, a better understanding of how the warning process throughout Missouri was achieved. Suggestions are made that can be used by Emergency Management Directors (EMDs) when siren activation may be necessary. The goal is to use this research to assist the development of statewide guidelines on appropriate activation of tornado sirens during severe weather events. If the suggested policies are considered by EMDs, it is hopeful a unified policy throughout the state can be developed. Thus, the desensitization of the public to sirens can be reduced and allow for the effective use of tornado sirens in warning the public.