

Severe Weather FAQ

Q. What is the difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning?

A. A tornado watch means that conditions are favorable for tornadoes to form. Be alert to weather conditions and announcements. A tornado warning means a tornado has been sighted or radar indicates rotation in the clouds. Lancaster County Emergency Management and the University will sound tornado sirens when a tornado has been spotted on the ground.

Q. Who issues a tornado watch?

A. The National Weather Service will issue a tornado watch.

Q. Who issues a tornado warning?

A. The National Weather Service will issue to tornado warning when conditions or radar indicate the possibility of a tornado. However, the Lancaster County Emergency Management will sound tornado sirens and the University will activate internal notification systems on confirmation of a tornado.

Q. Why is it possible that the National Weather Service may issue a tornado warning for the area but Lancaster County Emergency Management does not sound their civil defense sirens?

A. Lancaster County Emergency Management relies on trained spotters and their procedures call for activation of the civil defense sirens only when a tornado has been spotted on the ground. This criterion is intended to limit “false” alarms and provide residents at least 5 minutes to seek shelter. So when the sirens are sounded in the city and on the University campus, the warning should be taken seriously.

Q. How will I know when a tornado warning is over and we can leave the shelter area?

A. When a tornado warning expires, the University Operator will page UNL Building Maintenance Reporters. Lancaster County Emergency Management will stop sounding the civil defense sirens when the local warning is over. Local radio and television stations will announce that the warning has expired.

Q. When is the statewide test of the tornado alarm systems?

A. The state of Nebraska tests the tornado alarm systems on the first Wednesday in the first week of April (this doesn't have to be the first full week in April. For example, the statewide test in 2005 is March 30.

Q. Are we suppose to seek shelter during the test of the tornado warning systems?

A. All faculty, staff and students are requested to participate in the test to familiarize themselves with the locations of their designated shelters and the procedures to follow should UNL be struck by a tornado.

Q. I cannot hear the civil defense sirens activated by Lancaster County Emergency Management when I'm inside my building?

A. At this time, outdoor civil defense sirens are in place to warn those people outdoors to seek shelter indoors.

Q. According to the UNL Tornado Warning Policy, there are no internal alarms in my building. Who should I contact to address my concerns?

A. Please contact your Department Head/Chair with your concerns. Questions regarding the cost of installing an internal tornado system should be directed to Facilities Management.

Q. How can I find out who the Building Maintenance Reporter (BMR) is in my building?

A. Facilities Management service desk at 472-1550 can help you locate the name of a BMR in your building.

Q. Who should I contact about obtaining a BMR pager?

A. A BMR should contact Colleen Huls in IS-Communications at 472-2131.

Q. Who do I contact if I need new or replacement posters in my building?

A. A BMR should contact Colleen Huls in IS-Communications at 472-2131.

Q. Our office just moved into a new building. Who can help me find the best tornado shelter area?

A. A BMR should contact Colleen Huls in IS-Communications at 472-2131.

Q. According to the UNL Tornado Warning Policy, I am in a building with an interior tornado signal, however no one heard a signal during the tornado warning. Who should I contact?

A. Notify Facilities Management service desk at 472-1550.

Q. What does an interior tornado bell sound like?

A. An interior tornado bell sounds like a fire alarm; only the tornado bell rings 3 seconds on, 3 seconds off for a total of 5 minutes. A fire alarm is a continuous bell.

Q. Was that the University Operator giving the voice message in my building?

A. Some buildings will hear a prerecorded voice message. Other buildings will hear the voice of a UNL operator.

Q. If my building has no internal tornado signal, what can the occupants of my building do to prepare for severe weather?

A. Follow these suggestions:

1. Contact the BMR in your building and find out if they have a BMR pager issued by IS-Communications. If not, make sure your BMR knows how to get a pager. The BMR should anticipate severe weather and have the BMR pager with them (and turned on with a fresh battery) at all times.
2. Request that your department purchase weather alert radios to hear all broadcasts of the National Weather Service and the Lancaster Emergency Management office. These can be purchased from IS-Communications or any store that sells electronics.
3. Turn on a television or radio and listen to the severe weather broadcasts. Take a battery-operated radio with you into a tornado shelter for up-to-date weather information.

Q. How much does a weather alert radio from IS Communications cost?

A. IS-Communications sells a weather alert radio for \$60.

Q. How much does a BMR pager from IS-Communications cost?

A. IS-Communications does not sell the BMR pager. These are assigned to BMR's free of charge.

Q. If we do not have an internal tornado alarm system in our building, are we still suppose to seek shelter during the test of the tornado warning systems?

A. Buildings without an internal tornado alarm system need to rely upon the Building Maintenance Reporters or weather alert radios for these notifications, and that process needs to be tested. Therefore, yes - all faculty, staff, and students are requested to seek shelter during the test.

Q. Is there a way to receive alerts over the Internet?

A. InterLinc Desktop Alert Application is a FREE small, simple application, which you can download and install on your Windows-based personal computer. (Currently not available to Unix or Mac users.) It's like having your own, personal meteorologist right on your computer. Once installed and connected to the Internet, you will receive current temperature and severe weather warnings directly on your computer screen, as well as other features such as local and national weather. This PC based emergency alert system will improve public notification of local, state and national emergency warnings. It will provide rapid notification of severe weather, state Amber Alerts for missing children and emergencies issued through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security or local officials. This service is available at this URL <http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/main/desktop.htm>