
SUBJECT: DISASTER SITUATIONS

ADOPTED DATE: OCTOBER 5, 2020

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Cass County
Hazardous Weather Operations Plan

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LOCAL WARNING SYSTEM ACTIVATION CRITERIA

The Outdoor Warning Sirens in Cass County may be activated for any of the following conditions:

- The National Weather Service has issued a tornado warning for West Fargo, Fargo, Moorhead, or Dilworth or any portion of Cass County.
- A trained weather spotter has observed a tornado in Cass County, including the West Fargo, Fargo, Moorhead, or Dilworth vicinity and requested activation of the sirens. The weather spotter will relay this information to an amateur (ham) radio operator stationed within either the Red River Regional Dispatch Center or the West Fargo Dispatch Center.
- A trained Law Enforcement Officer has observed a tornado in the Cass County area, and requested siren activation. (Such a request should go through an agency/department supervisor if time permits).
- An on-scene Fire Department Incident Commander has requested activation of the sirens to alert the public of a hazardous materials or other life-threatening incident. The Incident Commander should have an evacuation plan, or other instructions such as “sheltering in-place,” for the public prepared and transmitted to the Dispatch Center or the media, prior to requesting siren activation.
- A Cass Fargo Emergency Manager has requested activation of the sirens.
- Testing and maintenance operations.

If any city in the metro area (Moorhead, Dilworth, Fargo or West Fargo) activates its warning sirens for a weather or hazardous material incident, **all the other cities in the area will also activate their sirens**. Whichever city decides to activate its sirens first will contact the other cities in the area and advise them of their decision.

If Fargo, Moorhead, or Dilworth are the first cities to activate their sirens, they will coordinate through the Red River Regional Dispatch Center for this activation. RRDC will notify the West Fargo Dispatch Center, advise them they are activating the sirens, and give the reason for activation.

- **NOTE: In the event that a community has no siren system or the local outdoor warning siren system is inoperable, the RRDC will dispatch law enforcement and fire units to use their siren and PA systems to warn citizens.**

TORNADO WARNING

The National Weather Service in Grand Forks is the primary source of severe weather information for the public. The National Weather Service will issue tornado watches and warnings to the public and local emergency response agencies as conditions dictate.

The Red River Dispatch Center is the siren activation control point for Cass County.

The National Weather Service will release information on siren activation related to tornado warnings based on information supplied by the RRDC and the West Fargo Dispatch Center.

Both RRDC and the National Weather Service in Grand Forks will release information to the media via the use of the Emergency Alert System (EAS), media paging, and fax. This information will be released as soon as possible so the public will be informed of the reason for the siren activation.

PROCEDURE:

Rural Cass County

When notified of a tornado warning for all or parts of Cass County, the RRDC will implement the following dissemination plan defined in the RRDC Outdoor Warning Siren Manual including:

- Activate the sirens for all affected cities.
- Broadcast by radio to Cass County mobile units, repeating the message EXACTLY as received.
- Page and notify all rural Cass Ambulance Services.
- Page or phone and notify all rural Cass Fire Departments.
- Notify a Cass Fargo Emergency Manager in case of a confirmed touchdown with damage.

City of Fargo

When notified of a tornado warning for the City of Fargo, or if included in a Cass County-wide warning, the communication operator shall implement the plan according to the RRDC Outdoor Warning Siren Manual including:

- Activate the sirens for the City of Fargo
- Notify NDSU PD by radio or phone to activate the siren located on NDSU Campus.
- Simulcast to the following agencies by radio, repeating the message EXACTLY as received. If radio traffic prohibits simulcast, notify by phone.
 1. Cass County Sheriff's Jail (Booking)
 2. West Fargo Police Department
 3. Fargo Fire Department
 4. NDSU Police Department
 5. FM Ambulance Service
 6. Fargo Police/Fire, Cass County Mobile Units
- Page via the Fargo Fire Department Media pager and announce that they will be receiving a weather-related fax.
- Fax the Media fax form with the weather message announcement.
- Notify a Cass Fargo County Emergency Manager in case of a confirmed touchdown with damage. (Fargo EM primary)

FLOOD WARNING

Advance warning for flood events is critical in allowing communities in Cass County to prepare for and respond to flooding situations. Cass County communities are responsible for preparing their own flood response plans.

Potential floods in Cass County fall into two general categories:

➤ Annual Spring Snowmelt

This typically occurs around the end of April, and is influenced by a combination of snowpack, temperature, and additional moisture during the melt cycle. Communities typically have adequate advanced warning for these events.

➤ Summer Rain Events

Heavy rains can create localized flooding including flash floods in a short time. These situations do not often provide advance warning.

Flood watches and warnings originate from the Grand Forks Office of the National Weather Service. The NWS provides real time and advanced flood prediction information through regular news releases.

RRDC will disseminate flash flood information to all law enforcement and fire units:

Simulcast to the following agencies by radio, repeating the message EXACTLY as received. If radio traffic prohibits simulcast, notify by phone.

1. West Fargo Police and Fire Departments
2. NDSU Police Department
3. Fargo Police and Fire Departments
4. Cass County Sheriff's Department

Detailed flood prediction information and real-time river gauge data for the Red River Valley is available through the National Weather Service Advanced Hydrologic Prediction Service at <https://water.weather.gov/ahps2/index.php?wfo=FGF> Another resource is the US Army Corps of Engineers web site at www.mvp-wc.usace.army.mil/ .

SEVERE SUMMER & WINTER WEATHER WARNING

The National Weather Service Office in Grand Forks will provide advance summer and winter weather advisories to the public through the media and to local emergency response agencies through the Emergency Alert System (EAS).

RRDC will disseminate severe summer or winter weather warning information to all law enforcement units:

Simulcast to the following agencies by radio, repeating the message EXACTLY as received. If radio traffic prohibits simulcast, notify by phone.

1. West Fargo Police & Fire Departments
2. NDSU Police Department
3. Fargo Police & Fire Departments
5. Cass County Sheriff's Department

SKYWARN WEATHER SPOTTER ACTIVATION CRITERIA

SkyWarn is a group of individuals made up of trained weather spotters and Red River Radio Amateurs - RRRRA (ham radio) that are trained to weather observe for the National Weather Service.

Before or during severe weather when weather spotters are needed, the National Weather Service will contact RRDC by phone or on the NAWAS frequency (Fargo Warning Point) and request the activation of the SkyWarn weather spotters. RRDC will page SkyWarn personnel according to the procedures established in the RRDC Outdoor Warning Siren Manual.

Ham radio operators will report to RRDC and West Fargo Police Department to communicate with SkyWarn personnel in the field.

EOC ACTIVATION

The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) will be activated for all incidents requiring a significant dedication of resources and/or extraordinary interagency coordination. The Cass County Commission Chairperson will make the decision regarding EOC activation. Not all disasters require full activation, in those instances, partial EOC activation will be ordered, and only relevant agencies and functional coordinators will be activated

Upon request of the Emergency Manager, the County Administrator, or the Cass County Commission Chair or Vice Chair, the RRDC will initiate a call back of the Functional Coordinators listed in the Cass County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) Appendix B.

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING STORM DAMAGE TO THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

In an effort to enhance the ability of the National Weather Service to understand the characteristics of severe weather activity as it happens, it is important to provide basic storm damage reports from observers on the ground in “real time”.

In an effort to provide this information to the NWS, all SkyWarn personnel and emergency responders in Cass County will provide the RRDC with “real time” preliminary damage reports from the field.

This information will be passed on to the National Weather Service Office in Grand Forks via normal established channels.

INSTALLATION OF OUTDOOR WARNING SIRENS

The weather warning siren system for Cass County is radio controlled from the RRDC. This single coordinated system operates the warning sirens in Fargo, Moorhead and several rural Cass and Clay County communities.

Rural Cass County communities desiring to connect to this radio-controlled system must coordinate the connection with the siren installer and the RRDC. The system controller must be programmed to accept the new siren. Communities are responsible for any fees associated with the connection to the RRDC.

Communities connecting their siren system must also coordinate an activation protocol for their city with the RRDC for testing and actual events.

WARNING-EVACUATION-SHELTER PLANS FOR THE DISABLED

Warning

- Emergency warning systems within Cass County include a combination of local outdoor warning sirens, the Emergency Alert System (EAS), along with emergency vehicle siren and public address systems.
- This combination of warning devices provides the broadest level of notification to residents of Cass County in the event of an imminent disaster emergency. These systems however do not guarantee that everyone will receive the warnings. This may be especially true for those with sight and hearing impairments.
- As a result, it is imperative that the sight and hearing impaired together with community organizations and facilities that provide the disabled services, along with neighbors, friends and relatives develop emergency notification plans that complement existing warning systems.

Evacuation and Shelter

- During a contained disaster emergency local law enforcement and fire departments will provide search and rescue and evacuation services as resources allow. They may be assisted by health and engineering officials together with personnel from other local organizations including the American Red Cross.

