

## **Have You Heard Our Sirens Lately? Stay informed in several ways.**

With the Spring season upon us, it seems to be a great time to offer some insight, and hopefully clarification, around our Outdoor Warning Sirens (OWS) and our Public Information (PI) messaging. It is an active weather period, and an active period for public questions, confusion, and curiosity.

**Background:** Both subjects are under purview of Pacific's Emergency Management Director (EMD). However, there are a combination of policies, procedures, training, and operational plans that exist across multiple City departments to make it all work. Additionally, the EMD directly interfaces with the STL National Weather Service staff in real-time to assess the live weather conditions and take actions necessary. There are many moving parts behind the scenes which determine siren activation (or not), and/or the sending of any messages to the public.

**Sirens:** Our public safety objective is focused on the City of Pacific which spans both Franklin and St. Louis counties. The City owns/operates six (6) Outdoor Warning Sirens strategically located around the Franklin County side of our boundaries. Two sirens are in the St. Louis County footprint, and they are owned/managed by that entity. A monthly test is performed on the first Monday of each month (weather dependent) at 11:00 AM, and is done simultaneously with St. Louis County as part of a STL metro regional agreement.

**Philosophy:** Firstly, the primary audience for the Outdoor Warning Sirens is for people who are outside at the time of the alert. Let me rephrase – the sirens are not prioritized to reach folks who are inside. Many times, they are audible to those inside even with the windows closed, but that is not the intended goal. Further, they are preprogrammed with canned messages for our most common concerns: tornados and thunderstorms (at certain thresholds), large Hazmat events, plus the monthly test. Our model of siren also allows for real-time announcements for other conditions.

Secondly, the sirens are not intended to be the only source of critical notification to the Community. They serve only one function in our broader emergency management public information tool arsenal. All people are urged to have a personal/family/business preparedness plan which includes multiple sources of information. Examples of these include: news media outlets (TV, radio, internet), NOAA emergency radio, and other City of Pacific social media/mass notification sites and apps. A listing of such City resources is presented in the PI section below.

**Triggers:** As you might be able to infer from the canned alerts referenced above, severe weather-related conditions are in the forefront of potential OWS activation. A few common National Weather Service (NWS) descriptors for context are: (1) Outlook – prepare a plan of action, (2) Advisory – use caution, (3) Watch – monitor and be prepared to act, and (4) Warning – take protective action now. An increasing sense of urgency is depicted in the timing of issuing (1) through (4).

These distinctions are important and impact our OWS activation (or not). Specifically, we shall activate the sirens for a Tornado Warning, an NWS alert with a “Destructive” tag, and for a serious, localized Hazmat scenario (e.g. train derailment with wind plumes). These are explicitly the case when the City of Pacific is overtly included in the issued alerts. It is also true when it appears we are imminently to be in harm's way. Conversely, as a normal course of action, we will not activate the sirens for Outlooks, Advisories or Watches.

I am often asked about Severe Thunderstorm Warning alerts and activating the OWS. This is a “hazier” decision especially in Pacific with geographically spreading 2 counties/siren jurisdictions. In general, as part of a STL Regional “handshake” the sirens are not normally activated solely by the issuance of a Severe Thunderstorm Warning. This is also true as it could be confusing to our east side residents if either Pacific or STL County activated, but not both simultaneously. However, STL County spans a large area and they set their sirens off for the whole County. We may have a serious threat here, while they do not. We make our decisions for our best interests.

**Public Information (PI):** Every person is encouraged to have multiple sources of forecasted and real-time emergency information. Do not rely on only one source as it may not be available at your time of need!

Traditional news media outlets like TV, radio and cable are well known and a great source of credible, real-time information. Quality PI is also available via cellphone apps and the internet. A NOAA Weather Radio is available and can be programmed to trigger alerts isolated to your specific county.

Locally, the City of Pacific has several PI pathways to share various items with the Public. These stem from information for planning purposes (e.g. an event or meeting) to a critical to take urgent action now (e.g. flooding event or major road closing). We encourage every resident, business, and visitor to avail themselves of these.

Specially, here are our local PI resources:

- Regroup Emergency Mass Notification system <https://pacificmo.app.regroup.com/login>
- Pacific Emergency Management Agency (EMA) Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/PacificMO.EMA>
- Pacific EMA website <https://www.pacificmissouri.com/285/Emergency-Management>
- Pacific Police Department Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pacific-Police-Department/1414764238785884>
- City of Pacific Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/cityofpacificmunicipalgovernment>
- City of Pacific website <https://www.pacificmissouri.com/>
- City of Pacific digital billboard (by City Hall)
- City of Pacific Quarterly Newsletter

Our EM policies specify which one or combination of the above pathways will be activated to share PI contingent on the circumstances, criticality and severity of needing attention. Thus, we encourage everyone to be connected to them all.

We take public safety and emergency management planning seriously and offer numerous pathways for you to be informed. In turn, we ask that that you'll do your part for yourself, your family/pets, employees, and neighbors to have a plan on what you'd do "in the event of" and maintain active connections to PI.

As always, should you have a life-threatening issue, contact 9-1-1, and for non-emergency matters 636-257-2424 available 24/7.

Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to Hal Schulman, EMD, [ema@pacificmissouri.com](mailto:ema@pacificmissouri.com).

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