



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Public Service Announcement

Dear Citizens,

On July 11th, 2020 the Pontiac Fire Department ordered the sirens to be sounded in response to the severe weather that impacted our area. Since the weather event, we have received feedback from members of our community on various aspects of our emergency response to severe weather. I would like to provide a response to some of the questions that were brought to our attention in an effort to help clarify and/or provide further education to the community on our department's severe weather procedures.

1. Question: “*Why can I not hear the tornado sirens when I am inside a building?*”

Response: Outdoor warning sirens are designed for alerting people outside their homes and away from other media sources of imminent danger from an approaching storm. It is designed to warn these people outside to take cover immediately. The sirens are not designed as a consistent warning system for persons inside of structures.

While sirens can be heard inside, there are a variety of factors that can influence someone's ability to hear the siren, such as topography, obstructions between the siren and the structure, construction of the building or residence, other noise sources (TV, radios, hail, wind, etc), and distance from the siren. Individuals are responsible for monitoring conditions for their personal safety.

2. Question: *“If I can not hear the sirens inside my residence then how do I know there is severe weather and I need to take shelter?”*

Response: The National Weather Service has created a warning system that consists of Watches and Warnings for a variety of weather conditions to keep people informed. These informational watches and warnings are broadcasted over local radio and television stations, NOAA Weather Radios, and/ or downloaded weather apps on your smart phone.

Weather alert radios are designed to receive broadcasts from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) thru the National Weather Service (NWS). These devices only broadcast weather information and are a valuable tool for monitoring severe conditions and are available in both desktop and portable units.

It is also important for individuals to understand the NWS Warning system. A Watch (Severe Thunderstorm or Tornado) means that conditions are right for these types of storms to occur. During a watch, people should monitor conditions and be prepared to take shelter. A Warning means that the severe weather is occurring in the area (Thunderstorm or Tornado) at this time, people should seek shelter immediately. People should not wait until the sirens are activated or a tornado is actually sighted in their specific area as this is too late. A Warning is the time when people need to be in a protected place monitoring conditions until they improve and the situation passes.

3. Question: *“Why did the tornado sirens activate when we did not receive a Tornado Warning.”*

Response: On July 11th, 2020, Livingston County was under a Severe Thunderstorm Warning. While our area was not under a Tornado Warning when the sirens were sounded the Pontiac Fire Department ordered the sirens to be activated while they were out on another emergency incident. The decision was made based upon information they had received from the 911 dispatch center. As a precautionary measure, the Pontiac Fire Department erred on the side of safety and activated the sirens even though there was not an active tornado warning in the area.

Tornados can rapidly develop during a severe thunderstorm without warning and the Pontiac Fire Department will always respond in accordance to their mission statement which is to “Protect the lives and property of the citizens of Pontiac from natural and man-made hazards through education, prevention, and mitigation.”

4. **Question:** *“Why did I not hear an “All Clear” siren?”*

Response: The Pontiac Fire Department decided a few years ago to disband the “All Clear” siren after recognizing that this process created confusion on whether the siren was meant for “All Clear” or another activation of the “Warning Siren” because of another severe weather threat. This change was publicized in the past by previous Fire Department Administrators and I have kept the process in place.

To help clarify to the public our siren activation procedures I want to advise that there will **NEVER** be an "All Clear" signal from the outdoor warning sirens. People in or near the warned area should monitor reliable sources such as NOAA All-Hazards Radio, local media services, and City of Pontiac social media pages. Citizens are also encouraged to join the City of Pontiac emergency alert system at <https://www.pontiac.org/64/Emergency-Alert> and also sign up for NIXLE alerts by texting the zip code to 888777 to know when the threat has dissipated.

The Pontiac Fire Department takes severe weather events very seriously and are continuously striving to provide a safer and better prepared community to be able to handle whatever nature throws at us. As Fire Chief, I feel it is very important to be transparent to the citizens we serve and I hope that the responses I have provided helps clarify some of the questions and concerns that were brought to our attention since our last weather event.

Please visit <https://www.pontiac.org/254/Fire-Department> for additional safety messages under the subsection: Community Risk Reduction. Also, please check out the other subsections of our web page that explain who we are and what services we provide.

Thank you for your feedback and please stay safe!

Respectfully,

Fire Chief Jacob Campbell

