



# PRESS RELEASE



April 11, 2016

## 2016 St. Clair County Severe Weather Week

To support the April 10-16 Severe Weather Awareness Week in Michigan, the St. Clair County Homeland Security – Emergency Management Office encourages communities and residents to review severe weather preparedness. As the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners also is proclaiming the week as Severe Weather Awareness week, there are several factors that St. Clair County residents should be aware of:

### CHANGE IN WARNING SIREN TESTING

St. Clair County tests the outdoor warning system the first Monday of every month. Beginning in April, residents will no longer hear the 3 minute tone for the test as the system now starts and stops the sirens over a 30 second period. This avoids any confusion between tests and actual events. We promote when a siren sounds in St. Clair County, residents should go inside, close windows and turn on local media. Activation of sirens are not always for weather events but are used to warn of chemical releases.

### STATEWIDE TORNADO DRILL

Numerous communities throughout the state are participating in a statewide drill on Wednesday, April 13 at 1:30 p.m. EDT. St. Clair County encourages everyone to take the time to conduct and evaluate a severe weather but will not activate the warning siren system for the designated drill.

St. Clair County has experienced 23 tornadoes since 1950 with 2 occurring in 2015. It is important that our residents understand that these tornadoes occurred while the County was not under a Tornado Warning but determined later in the day(s) by National Weather Service personnel. The previous 3 tornadoes before 2015 were also determined after the event which clearly indicates our residents need to take Severe Thunderstorm Warnings extremely serious for the protection of their loved ones.

The HSEM office still finds there is significant confusion between the terms “watch” and “warning”.

- A tornado or severe thunderstorm watch is issued whenever conditions exist for severe weather to develop. Watches are usually for large areas about two-thirds the size of Lower Michigan and are usually two-to-six hours long. Watches give you time to plan and prepare.
- Warnings are issued for even smaller areas, such as parts of counties. These “storm-based” NWS warnings are issued for the threatened area in a shape of a polygon. The “polygon” warnings only include sections of a county or group of counties and usually last for 30 to 90 minutes in length. You must act immediately when you first hear the warning.

## TAKING PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Plan ahead. Be sure everyone in your household knows where to go and what to do in case of a tornado or thunderstorm warning.

It is important that every family be able to receive a weather message. There are numerous applications for our mobile devices that can provide this. An excellent option is the St. Clair County WINS systems that allows you to customize the type of alerts received and allows receipt through multiple methods. In the event of a “tornado warning” the WINS system will automatically notify subscribers but also utilize white and yellow page data to notify those in the potential path of the tornado.

If severe weather is threatening your location, seek safe shelter when you first hear thunder and, when you see dark threatening clouds developing overhead, or see lightning. Remember, lightning can strike more than 10 miles away from any rainfall.

The best action is to immediately go to the basement and get under something sturdy, like a workbench or stairwell. If a basement is not available, go to an interior part of your home on the lowest level. A good rule of thumb is to put as many walls between you and the tornado as possible. seek shelter in the innermost room on the lowest level of the structure and listen to local media. We strongly recommend taking your emergency supply kit to that location however our survey’s indicate less than half of our homes have these kits.

It is EXTREMELY important that every facility in St. Clair County review their severe weather procedures. You are responsible for the lives of your employees and the guests that visit/shop with you. We know there are approximately 70% of our facilities that do not have any form of weather notification, lack procedures, emergency supplies, and have trained their staff on severe weather procedures. The HSEM office is willing to assist you to improve the safety and your ability to recover in the event of significant destruction.

Be Safe – Be Ready by preparing for Severe Weather Awareness Week – April 10-16 !