

Sheriff provides severe weather info

Editors note: the following release was submitted by Brown County Sheriff John Merchant

I would like to remind county residents that with the coming of spring we also have the increased chances for tornados and severe thunderstorms and to provide some information to help keep everyone a little safer.

When Brown county is placed in a "TORNADO WARNING" by the National Weather

Service OR when a trained storm spotter identifies tornadic activity, the Brown County Sheriff's office will sound the sirens in Hiawatha, Powhattan and Reserve--the other areas of the county will be notified as quickly as possible and suggested they do likewise. This policy will allow dispatch the authority to warn residents ASAP and save valuable time and lives. Since 1986 all or a portion of Brown County has been placed under a tornado warning less than 2-3 times each year as an average. My main concern is and always will be the safety of Brown county residents.

I have talked with several different meteorologists and have been informed that when atmospheric conditions are favorable for severe thunderstorms, a severe thunderstorm may move into or develop over any part of the county and tornadic thunderstorms my not be confined to just one part of the county. Not one of the meteorologists could assure me that if a tornado warning was issued in the southern part of Brown County, tornado activity would not affect other parts of the county. so in order to give residents as much time as possible to take cover, I have implemented this tornado policy to take care of all of Brown County as a whole.

***Tornados can form very rapidly with little or no warning at all. *Supercell thunderstorms can produce large violent tornados and usually residents will have time to take cover but not always.**

***Rain wrapped tornados may NOT be visible from the ground and are very difficult to spot at night.**

***Tornados can change directions without warning.**

Tornado sirens are meant to be a warning device for people who are outdoors so if you are in your home when the sirens are activated, you may not be able to hear them. We will NEVER sound an all clear siren as this could confuse

residents when it is safe to leave their shelters. So at any time when you hear the sirens, there is a potential for tornado activity in our immediate area. Please listen to your local media source for updates and further information.

We are encouraging everyone in the county to have multiple means of receiving severe weather watch and warning notifications. I encourage everyone to own a battery operated ALL HAZARDS NOAA Weather Radio which broadcasts severe weather information directly from the National Weather Service. If commercial power is lost due to a storm, batteries will allow the radio to be activated and wake you up in the middle of the night. In addition, we also urge residents to listen to local TV and radio media for the latest on severe weather coverage. Calling trees are also a good idea so friends and relatives can contact each other to make sure they are all aware of severe weather approaching.

Residents also need to know where to take cover in the event a tornado warning is in effect for our area. Families need to practice where they will go to in order to stay safe. Also look out after your elderly neighbors who live alone or those with medical or health conditions that may need extra assistance. This is what it's all about, people helping each other.

Several years ago I took the opportunity to speak with most of the mayors in Brown county and asked them where a storm shelter would located be in their areas in case the tornado sirens sounded and they needed to take cover. Some did not have and plans in place and took the initiative to do so and identified churches or other buildings in their community for the safety of their citizens. We still encourage everyone to keep doing this. One of my main concerns is the safety of those not knowing what to do or where to go should we have a tornado in our county.

We also offer the basement of the Brown County Sheriffs office as a storm shelter for those in need. Over the past several years we have had quite a number of citizens that have taken refuge in our facility and will continue to offer this as an option for those seeking shelter during severe thunderstorms, tornados, blizzard conditions etc.

I am very proud to have the opportunity to work with all of the emergency responders we have in Brown County. These dedicated men and women respond at all hours of the night and day to many different emergencies in our county and work together to help provide us with a safer place to live and raise our families. When chances of severe weather are forecasted, they are the first one stationed all over the county to alert us of potential danger. We all owe them a big THANK YOU!!!.

If anyone has any questions or concerns, please come by or contact me at the Sheriffs office.

Sheriff John D. Merchant

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