

Sheriff discusses tornado warning protocol

Editors note: the following was submitted by Brown Co Sheriff John Merchant.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind county residents about the following protocol when a Tornado Warning is issued for Brown County, and hopefully answer any concerns the public may have. One main focus of mine will always be the safety and well being of every person in our county.

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 any other locations where we have authority and suggest other areas of the county upon notification should do likewise. This policy will allow dispatch the authority to warn residents ASAP and save valuable time seeking shelter. 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. In the past, I have talked with several different meteorologists and have been informed that when atmospheric conditions are favorable for severe thunderstorms, a severe thunderstorm has the potential develop over any part of the county and tornadic thunderstorms may not be confined to just one part of our area. 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 the 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.**

Outdoor tornado sirens are meant to be a warning device for people who are OUTDOORS, so if you are in your home when the tornado sirens are activated, you may not be able to hear them.

We are encouraging everyone in the county to have multiple means of getting severe weather watch and warning notifications, The public is encouraged 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 is spotted in 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.

I suggest that the mayors in Brown county identify where storm shelters would located be in their areas in case the tornado sirens sounded and their citizens need to take cover. Some have identified churches or other buildings in their community for the safety of their citizens to take shelter. 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. These areas need identified and the public needs informed as to where to go in the event of a tornado warning.

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 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.

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