

Severe Weather Awareness Week April 13-17,2020

RICE COUNTY — Severe Weather Awareness Week takes place April 13-17 this year, with the statewide tornado drills on Thursday, April 16.

Historically, early springtime is “flood season” in our state — but in 1998 it was only late March when violent storms brought 13 tornadoes to St. Peter and Comfrey and also 1 to Lonsdale and rural Rice County areas east of Lonsdale. On July 13, 2013, Rice County received over 8 inches of rain in a short time period over areas in the northern half of the county causing flash flooding conditions and washing roads away throughout those areas. Late September is typically considered a “dry time” – yet on September 20, 2018, September 22, 2010 and again in 2017, severe weather struck southern Minnesota, including communities in Rice County. with several tornadoes and/or flooding,

If that wasn't enough, between March and September of 2010, Minnesota experienced a record 113 tornadoes, (the most in the U.S.) with a total of 48 on a single day in June, some of those twisters occurred just south of Rice County; not to mention on September 20, 2018 when Minnesota saw 25 tornadoes along with damaging winds, 10 of which touched down in Rice County. In 2017, Minnesota broke the record for the earliest tornados on record – three reported on March 6, 2017.

The lesson from these events is that Minnesota weather hazards can happen anytime and anywhere, and the key to maintaining your personal safety and well-being is to be aware of the threats, be prepared, and know how to respond when those threats are approaching. Understanding this threat and knowing what to do when a tornado or other severe weather is approaching can save lives.

An informed, involved community is more resilient to disaster, and being prepared helps reduce the risks and costs of hazardous weather events. This year during Severe Weather Awareness Week ask yourself a simple but important question: “Are You Ready?” This question can apply to almost any emergency situation, but thinking through the answer now could be a life saver later. Nearly every county in Minnesota experiences some type of severe weather threat every season. Being informed about the threats and having a plan to deal with them can often be the most important protection anyone can have.

To help citizens achieve these goals, the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, along with the National Weather Service sponsor Severe Weather Awareness Week annually. An easy way to get prepared is by participating in Severe Weather Awareness Week. The statewide tornado drills provide an excellent opportunity for citizens to prepare their homes, families, neighborhoods, and communities!

This year's event takes place April 13-17, with Tornado Drill Day on Thursday, April 16. Outdoor warning sirens will sound in a simulated tornado warning. This year the National Weather service has decided not to sound the NOAA Weather radios due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Businesses, hospitals and other organizations that are currently working are still encouraged to practice emergency plans during the statewide tornado drill at 1:45 p.m. on Thursday. A second drill at 6:45 p.m. will take place in most counties, including Rice County, to allow a second chance for families and second-shift workers to practice sheltering plans.

Everyone is encouraged to create a plan, build an emergency kit and practice drills. "Every individual, family and business should take this opportunity to prepare and practice their weather emergency plans," states Jennifer Hauer-Schmitz, Rice County Emergency Management Director. "Dangerous weather such as severe thunderstorms or tornados do not follow any kind of a pattern, and they are common in Minnesota. That is why it is so important to know what to do when the weather strikes - there's no substitute for practice when the real thing comes along." Hauer-Schmitz also states "Severe weather can and will occur even during the COVID-19 Pandemic, so it is more important than ever to practice safety measures and be prepared for whatever may occur! This year is a perfect time for the families that are home together to take advantage of Severe Weather Awareness Week to develop or review your family's emergency procedures and prepare for weather or other hazards."

Find more lifesaving information at:

<https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/hsem/weather-awareness-preparedness/Pages/default.aspx>. The site contains information on weather alerts and warnings, thunderstorms, hail, lightning, flash floods, tornadoes and heat waves, along with instructions on how to make a survival kit, develop a plan to shelter or escape, and avoid surprises by staying informed of weather conditions. There is also weather information provided in eight different languages.

Please remember the statewide tornado drill on Thursday, April 16, 2020 and plan to participate at 1:45 p.m., 6:45 p.m. or both! Don't let severe weather catch you unprepared! Get ready during Severe Weather Awareness Week!

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