



# COUNTY OF HENRY

## OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY

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### **For Immediate Release**

(February 20, 2009, Paris, TN) Henry County Emergency Management wishes to announce Governor Phil Bredesen, the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, and the National Weather Service have declared February 23-27, 2009, "Severe Weather Awareness Week". Henry County will be participating in several events through out the week relating to severe weather preparedness.

Ronald Watkins, Emergency Management Director states, "We have recently experienced a major high wind event. Henry County did sustain some damage across the county. Trees were downed, utility lines damaged, and several homes damaged by high winds. I think we were lucky to come out as we did compared to the extreme forecast given for our area."

Watkins is pleased to announce that Henry County is now a designated "StormReady Community" by the National Weather Service in Memphis. This designation was received in December 2008 and a formal presentation in January was postponed due to expected winter weather. NWS designed the StormReady program to help communities better prepare for and mitigate effects of extreme weather-related events. StormReady also helps establish a commitment to creating an infrastructure and systems that will save lives and protect property. Receiving StormReady recognition does not mean that a community is storm proof, but StormReady communities are better prepared when severe weather strikes. Watkins adds, "This designation was achieved by the combined effort of all local emergency response agencies, 911 and sheriff's dept dispatchers, and the community warning systems in place. Without the cooperation and support of local emergency preparedness activities by our community, we would not have achieved this recognition." The National Weather Service plans to reschedule a formal presentation to our county and signage will then be erected with the StormReady logo.

Watkins wishes to remind citizens that preparedness is the best defense. One easy way to prepare includes purchasing a NOAA Weather Radio. Our area transmitter is located in the Vale community using the frequency **162.450 MHz** and can be received on any standard NOAA Weather Radio. The broadcast transmission originates from the regional National Weather Service office in Memphis and provides a coverage radius of approx. 40 miles. Counties included in the coverage area are Benton, Carroll, Henry and Weakley. The 1000-watt transmitter provides up to the minute weather forecasts and advanced warning of approaching severe weather such as a tornado. Weather radio receivers are available for low cost that will instantly turn it self on when important warning information is issued by the National Weather Service in Memphis. Watkins states, "Advanced warning of severe weather is

important to the safety of your family. An advanced warning could provide that extra time desperately needed to react and take cover.

A new type of warning system is being planned for Henry County. According to Watkins, the Northwest Tennessee District 9 Homeland Security Council has been awarded a \$300,000 grant through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for an early warning system. The council decided to purchase a system called *FM Alert*, which uses local FM radio station sub carrier frequencies to disseminate emergency warning information. All nine counties of Northwest Tennessee will be supplied with receivers to give out to local emergency response agencies, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and government agencies free of charge. The free receivers are the size of a pager and a desktop model and a computer USB model will be available. The public will also have the ability to purchase receivers at local retailers to be determined. The system will be web based and a text message will be displayed on the receiver for the given warning. Additionally, local officials will have the ability to send out specific local information such as a road closure or what specific area of county severe weather is occurring. This will be another tool in the emergency manager's tool bag for emergency information dissemination. It is currently being used in Memphis and they are very pleased with the operation thus far. More information will be provided as the system becomes operational.

Watkins suggests families make preparedness plans and practice sheltering in safe areas of your home. "Try to put as many walls as you can between yourself and outside. Use pillows and cushions to cover with when sheltering and get to lower floor if possible." Consider creating an emergency supplies kit with extra food, water, flashlights, and batteries. Stock with blankets and first aid supplies as well. Small tools could be useful as well in an emergency situation.

On Wednesday, February 25, Henry County will once again participate in "State wide Drill Day". Watkins has asked local schools to practice facility tornado preparedness plans. The schools have been requested to conduct an actual tornado drill in each school. This gives the students and faculty an opportunity to practice the actual motions to go through if an actual warning were given for their area. Each school in the county now has a NOAA Weather Radio and access to immediate warning information. The "test warning" will be broadcasted by the National Weather Service between 9 and 9:30 AM Wednesday morning. Additionally, The Henry County Schools and Paris Special Schools radio communication systems will be tested by having our 911-dispatch center pass along the "test warning." The City of Paris lone warning siren atop city hall will also be tested as well as the Town of Henry warning siren. Local daycares, nursing homes, manufacturing plants, and government agencies are urged to participate. Additionally, the Emergency Management Office will conduct an Emergency Operations Center communications drill scheduled for Thursday morning, February 26.

In conjunction with Severe Weather Awareness Week, Watkins has been working with Lisa Spencer, Chief Meteorologist, WSMV-DTV Nashville, to bring their severe weather presentation, *Surviving the Storm*, to Paris. "I had a chance to meet Ms. Spencer and see her speak at a Paris Landing emergency management conference in 2006. I thought it would great if I could convince Channel 4 to come to Paris to give this great program." They are planning to be here on Tuesday March 24 at the Krider Performing Arts Center on Volunteer Drive. All of the Channel 4 weather team personalities will be here and they will be broadcasting live from Paris starting at 5PM. The show will begin at 6:30 PM. Their weather mascot "Snowbird" will be here and they plan to give out lots of door prizes and great severe weather preparedness information. It should be a fun event for the whole family!

For additional information, please contact the Henry County Emergency Management at 644-2678 or visit the Henry County EMA web site at <http://ema.henrycountyttn.org>.