

# Cherokee County Emergency Management

100 W Maple

PO Box 143

Columbus, KS 66725

Office: 620-429-1857

Fax: 620-429-1858

## Cherokee County Emergency Preparedness

### WHAT IS EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS?

Emergency Preparedness in Cherokee County combines a staff of three and volunteers who work to protect the health and safety of the community. Many hundreds of hours each year are spent training for and responding to emergency and disaster situations. We provide community education, aid businesses that have hazardous materials with emergency planning and reporting, as well as all-hazards planning and preparation. Cherokee County works with fire and police agencies in to form weather spotter in the event of severe weather. These spotters are certified through weather spotter classes instructed by the Springfield National Weather Service. Almost all County employees are trained in an emergency response function.

### WHY EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS?

Our emergency services (fire, law enforcement, EMS, etc.) and emergency support agencies (public works, public health, public information, etc.) know their specific jobs and do them well. On the surface, therefore, it might appear that the Emergency Preparedness function is unnecessary. Many disasters (Hurricane Andrew, LA Riots, Northridge Earthquake, etc.) have repeatedly shown that the biggest problems stem not from the inability of individual response agencies, but from a lack of overall coordination and of an ongoing preparedness program. Emergency Preparedness prepares for what we hope never happens and provides structure and coordination when it does.

### HOW CAN YOU CONTACT US?

The Emergency Preparedness Department is located in the Courthouse, **110 W Maple, Columbus, Kansas 66725**. Our office number is **620-429-1857**. After hours leave a voice mail or for emergencies, contact us through the Sheriff's Office at **620-429-3992**.

## Chemical Emergencies

We use chemicals every day around our homes and in our places of work. Chemicals can be helpful agents in fueling our vehicles, painting our homes and appliances, removing paint, fertilizing our gardens and farms, killing weeds, killing bugs and pests, cleaning, lubricating and preparing parts, disinfecting and cleaning bathrooms and kitchens, and many other useful purposes. Businesses and industries use chemicals to produce their products or provide their services. In Cherokee County, there are a number of businesses and industries that use and/or produce chemicals. These businesses include farm fertilizer services, auto painting/servicing, pest control services, oil production and producing electricity, among other industries.

Because chemicals are used all about our lives, it would be no surprise to find them around every part of our surroundings, but we may not be aware of their presence. They can be in the basements, garages, kitchens and bathrooms of our homes. They can be in the businesses and

industries that operate in our communities. Cherokee County has major state and interstate highways and rail lines running through it, so chemicals are transported on the roadways and rail lines throughout the county. We may find chemicals in various containers or closed systems such as bags, bottles, cans, pails, pipelines, tanks, etc.

Chemicals are useful items in our lives and can be safely used, handled and stored if done in a controlled or common sense manner. When chemicals are not controlled or are lost from their closed systems, we must be prepared to act in a manner to limit our exposure to the hazards from their spill or release.

### **WHAT TO DO IF YOU OBSERVE A CHEMICAL SPILL/RELEASE**

If you observe a chemical spill or release, either driving down a road or looking out your window at home, report the spill/release by dialing 9-1-1. The 9-1-1 Operator will dispatch the proper response agency.

### **WHAT TO DO IN A CHEMICAL EMERGENCY**

A chemical emergency can occur from a transportation source, such as trucks or railcars, or from businesses or industries in the area. If a chemical emergency occurs in your neighborhood, you will be notified by local officials using a combination of radio, television, door-to-door contact. If your health and/or safety are in danger you will either be advised to shelter-in-place or to evacuate.

### **HOW COULD A RELEASE OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL HAPPEN IN CHEROKEE COUNTY?**

An accident involving radioactive materials is possible anywhere radioactive materials are used or transported. These materials can be found in medical, industrial, research, or construction activities. Kansas Department of Health and Environment or the Nuclear Regulatory Commission must license companies using a radioactive source. A transportation accident involving someone hauling radioactive material is very possible. In Cherokee County, highways and railroads are used to transport these materials.

In the event a foreign country was to attack the United States using nuclear weapons, Cherokee County could receive radioactive fallout, or be a target for attack.

If a hazardous radiation situation occurs, persons from local emergency groups, Cherokee County Emergency Preparedness, and numerous volunteers would be called in without delay. These responders would check for a radioactive release and contamination to personnel or vehicles, inform the public on what actions to take, and work to protect the health and safety of everyone involved.

## **Pipeline Safety**

### **IF YOU LIVE OR WORK NEAR A PIPELINE:**

#### **HOW CAN YOU TELL WHERE A PIPELINE IS LOCATED?**

Since pipelines are buried underground, line markers are used to indicate their approximate location along the route. The markers can be found where a pipeline intersects a street, highway

or railroad. Markers display the material transported in the line, the name of the pipeline operator, and a telephone number where the operator can be reached in the event of an emergency.

### **IT IS A FEDERAL CRIME TO REMOVE OR DEFACE A PIPELINE MARKER SIGN**

Pipeline marker signs are important to public safety. They are so important, in fact, that Congress in 1988 passed a law making it a federal crime for any person to willfully deface, damage, remove or destroy any pipeline sign right-of-way marker that is required by federal law. The penalty for each offense is a fine of up to \$5,000 or imprisonment for not more than a year or both.

### **ARE MARKERS ALWAYS PLACED ON TOP OF THE PIPELINE?**

Markers indicate the general location of a pipeline. They cannot be relied upon to indicate the exact position of the pipeline they mark. Also, the pipeline may not follow a straight course between markers. While markers are helpful in locating pipelines, they are limited in the information they provide. They provide no information, for example, on the depth or number of pipelines in the vicinity.

### **HOW CAN YOU RECOGNIZE A PIPELINE LEAK?**

Sight, sound, and smell are helpful in detecting pipeline leaks.

#### **LOOK FOR:**

- Crude oil or liquid petroleum products on the ground
- A dense white cloud or fog
- A spot of dead vegetation in an otherwise green location may indicate a slow leak
- Flames (if the leak has ignited) do not attempt to extinguish any primary fire source until pipeline company employees arrive and their representative directs this action.

#### **LISTEN FOR:**

- A roaring sound
- A hissing sound

#### **SMELL FOR:**

- A pungent odor, sometimes like "rotten eggs"
- A gasoline-like odor

### **WHAT YOU SHOULD DO IF YOU SUSPECT A LEAK**

Your first concern should be for your personal safety and that of those around you.

- Leave the leak area immediately
- Avoid driving into vapor clouds
- Contact the Sheriff's office at 620-429-3992

# Severe Weather

## THE COUNTY WEATHER PLAN

During potential tornado conditions, the county will deploy persons, called Storm Spotters, to look for developing situations that could lead to a tornado. When they spot a funnel cloud or a wall cloud, two conditions that precede a tornado's formation, the Spotters will call in a report to the county Emergency Operations Center.

The county's Emergency Preparedness office will also be observing the weather, using radar, and National Weather Service reports.

When a funnel cloud or a tornado has been sighted, the severe weather sirens will be activated. There will be NO all clear siren sounded. To determine if the danger has passed, listen to your radio.

## WHAT TO DO WHEN SEVERE WEATHER THREATENS

Severe weather can hold many hazards, but injuries and deaths may be minimized, if precautions are taken. Although there is no guaranteed safe place during a tornado, some locations are better than others. By following these safety tips you can increase your chances for survival.

At signs of threatening weather, check the weather forecast, especially before leaving for extended periods of time outdoors. Postpone outdoor activities if thunderstorms are imminent. Keep a portable (battery-powered) AM/FM Radio with you. NOAA Weather Radio is available in Cherokee County. Weather information is broadcasted. Weather radios can be obtained from businesses where electronics are sold.

If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck by lightning. Move to safe shelter immediately in a sturdy building or car. Do not shelter in a shed, under isolated trees, or in convertible cars. Get out of boats and away from water.

Telephone lines and metal pipes conduct electricity. Unplug and avoid using electrical appliances. Use the telephone only in an emergency. Turn off air conditioners. Power surges from lightning can overload compressors. Do not take a bath or shower.

## IF CAUGHT OUTDOORS

Find a low spot away from trees, fences, and poles. Make sure the place you pick won't be subject to flooding. If you are in the woods, take shelter under the shorter trees. If you feel your skin tingle or your hair standing on end you are about to be struck by lightning, squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet (do not lay flat). Place your hands on your knees and your head between them. Make yourself as small as possible and minimize contact with the ground.

## TORNADO

- **TORNADO WATCH:** Tornadoes, severe thunderstorms, or both are possible.
- **TORNADO WARNING:** Take shelter immediately. A tornado has been sighted.
- **FUNNEL CLOUD:** A strong, rotating column of air extending from the base of a cloud to the ground.

- **WALL CLOUD:** A lowered cloud base usually found at the southwest edge of a thunderstorm; it suggests rapidly rising air and possibly a severe thunderstorm. With the proper mix of humidity, warm air and strong high level winds, it can signal a tornado formation.

## **DURING A TORNADO WATCH**

A tornado watch is given when weather conditions are favorable for the formation of tornadoes; for example during severe thunderstorms. If a tornado WATCH is issued for your county, get set.

- Watch TV and listen to local radio for further information.
- Watch the horizon. If you see any revolving funnel-shaped clouds, report them immediately to Emergency Preparedness at **620-429-1857** or the Sheriff at **620-429-3992**.
- Know the locations of designated shelters in public facilities such as schools, public buildings and shopping centers.
- Have emergency supplies on hand. Have a household plan for where to go and what to do.

## **DURING A TORNADO WARNING**

A tornado warning is given when a tornado funnel is sighted or indicated by radar. You should take shelter immediately. Because tornadoes can form and move quickly, there may not be time for a warning. That's why it is important to stay alert during severe storms. If a tornado warning is issued for Cherokee County or if you suspect a tornado is near, go to shelter immediately.

Go to the basement. If there is no basement, go to the lowest floor and into a bathroom, closet, or interior hallway in the center of the building. Stay away from windows.

Protect yourself under something sturdy, and protect your head.

Leave your mobile home or car and seek shelter. If there is no substantial building nearby to go to for safety, lie flat in a ditch or low-lying area with your hands protecting your head.

### **AT HOME**

The safest place to be during a tornado is underground, preferably a basement under something sturdy like a work bench.

If there's no basement or cellar in your home, a small room in the middle of the house, like a bathroom or a closet, is best. The more walls between you and the outside, the better.

### **IN A MOBILE OR MANUFACTURED HOME**

Plan ahead. Go to a prearranged shelter or make arrangements with a friend, relative or neighbor with a basement or shelter to see if you can go to their house when the weather turns bad.

If you live in a mobile home park, talk to management about the availability of nearby shelter. If no emergency plan exists, consider setting up a neighborhood information program. Hold briefings on safety procedures as tornado season approaches.

As a last resort, if you can find no other shelter, go outside and lie flat on the ground with your hands over your head and neck. Be alert for flash floods that often accompany such storms.

Whatever you do, **EVACUATE A MOBILE OR MANUFACTURED HOME.**

### **IN YOUR AUTOMOBILE**

If you see a funnel cloud or hear a tornado warning on the radio or a siren, stop and seek shelter. Go to a sturdy building or home if one is near. Otherwise, move away from the vehicle, try a nearby ditch, gully or ravine. Do not get under the vehicle. Choose a spot in the gully, ditch, ravine that is not near items that could topple into or onto you. Lie flat, face down and put your arms over your head.

Tornadoes can toss cars - even large trucks - around like toys. NEVER try to outrun a tornado.

### **AT WORK OR SCHOOL**

Be aware of emergency shelter plans in plants, office buildings and schools you and your family frequent.

If a specific shelter area does not exist, move into interior hallways or small rooms on the building's lowest level. Avoid areas with glass and wide, free span roofs.

### **AT A STORE OR SHOPPING MALL**

If you can't get into a basement or designated shelter, move to the center of the lowest level of the building, away from windows, and lie flat.

Get into a restroom or near the restroom. In larger buildings, restrooms are usually made from concrete blocks. Besides having four walls and plumbing holding things together, the metal partitions help support falling debris.

Try to get against something that will support or deflect debris, such as heavy counters, sturdy, fixed shelving or a sturdy solid table.

### **AFTER THE STORM**

- Be aware of all potential hazards such as broken glass and downed power lines.
- Check to see if anyone is injured and render assistance or notify proper authorities.
- Survey the damage and take photographs of damaged areas if possible.
- Contact your agent and/or insurance company and report the loss as soon as possible. Make a note regarding the date of the call and the person with whom you speak.
- Make temporary repairs which are necessary to protect your property from further damage. Do not have permanent repairs made until you are authorized to do so by the adjuster. This would include but not be limited to boarding up broken windows, placing plastic over the roof in places where it is leaking, and dry out carpets and furniture which may be wet. Special care should be taken with some items such as antiques, paintings, silver, etc. You may want to contact a specialist on how to handle these types of items.
- Realize that in catastrophic situations insurance companies and their adjusters will handle large losses first but will work to handle all claims in a timely manner. If you have not heard in a reasonable amount of time from your adjuster, contact your agent or company.

- Make a detailed list of your damage or destroyed personal property and provide a copy to the adjuster.
- If your dwelling is uninhabitable your agent or company will provide your information on whether your policy covers additional living expenses. You will need to keep receipts of all these expenses for documentation if you have coverage.
- Rest often and eat well, keep a manageable schedule, make a list of jobs to do one at a time. Discuss your concerns with others and seek help.