The Process of Change and a City’s Outdoor Warning Siren Policy

National Tornado Summit 2016
OKC Office of Emergency Management
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OKC Office of Emergency Management

- Police Department
- Small staff
- Multiagency Coordination Center (MACC)
OWS Roles & Responsibilities

- 911 Communications/Public Services Dispatch
- Office of Emergency Management
- Information Technology
182 Outdoor Warning Sirens
Old Policy

- County based activation
- Activated each time a new tornado warning is issued by the NWS WFO Norman, OK
- No all-clear is given
- Tested on Saturday at noon
125 Years of Tradition Unimpeded by Progress

I wonder if future generations will have to deal with this attitude.

...because this is the way we've always done it!

Courtesy of Paul Combs Firefighter Cartoons
Identify the Need for Change and Create a Sense of Urgency

Step #1
Create a Guiding Coalition

Step #2
Develop the Vision

Step #3
Communicate the Vision

Step #4
Overcome Barriers and Resistance

Step #5
Create Short-Term Wins

Step #6
Institutionalize Change

Step #7
New – Activation Policy

• Threat based sector activation
• The OKC OWS sectors are activated when:
  – National Weather Service (NWS) Tornado Warning
    • Storm-Based Warning Polygon covers one or more OWS sectors in whole or in part.
  – Public safety personnel in the field
  – Credible evidence of a tornado
  – Recommendation from the Oklahoma City Office of Emergency Management
New – Area to be Warned

• Activate the OWS sectors in the portion of the city threatened by a tornado.
• The OWS is divided into nine sectors.
• Sectors labelled 1-9
• Also sectors labelled based on cardinal directions (North, South, East, and West)
Sectors - Numbers
Sectors – Cardinal Directions
WeatherWarn
Decision Making

• OKC OEM provides support to the decision making process
• 911 Communications still makes the decision to activate the sirens
• 911 Communications still activates the sirens
What Didn’t Change

- May activate OKC OWS sector(s) more than once
- No all clear given
- Tested on Saturday at noon
Desired Public Action
(What the Sirens Mean)

• Take shelter
• Seek more information
Benefits

• Reduce over warned population by 68%
  – Warning area larger than necessary
• Eliminate false warnings
  – When no threat to City of OKC
• Increased coordination and collaboration between 911 Communications and OKC OEM
• Slight over warning still occurs – Motorists
• Reduces wear and tear on the sirens
Questions?