

# OVERLAND PARK POLICE DEPARTMENT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE



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**TOPIC:** STORM WARNING PROCEDURES  
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Chief of Police    Bureau Commander

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## I. PURPOSE

This procedure provides guidelines for actions to be taken during severe weather events.

## II. DEFINITIONS

Severe Thunderstorm Watch: Issued by the Storm Prediction Center when severe thunderstorms are possible across the watch area. A severe thunderstorm features hail > 1” in diameter, wind speeds > 57mph, and can produce tornadoes. Watches are usually in effect for six (6) hours or less.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning: Issued by the local forecast office when a thunderstorm is expected to produce hail greater than or equal to 1” in diameter, or wind gusts greater than 57 mph usually based on radar data. A severe thunderstorm warning is usually in effect for less than an hour.

Tornado Watch: Issued by the Storm Prediction Center when severe thunderstorms that have the capability to produce tornadoes are expected. Typically, wind shear is more favorable for rotating storms when a tornado watch is issued than for a severe thunderstorm watch. Watches are usually in effect for 6 hours or less.

Tornado Warning: Issued by the local forecast office when a thunderstorm is expected to produce a tornado based on radar detected rotation or if trained storm spotters report a tornado. A warning may also be issued if storm spotters call in a report of low level rotation. A tornado warning is usually in effect for less than an hour.

Shelter-In-Place Plan: A precautionary measure designed to keep occupants of a structure safe for a temporary period of time during events such as tornados and in which occupants remain or enter an available structure/location to seek shelter from the approaching storm.

Take Cover Plan: A proactive measure, put into effect by field units to warn citizens to take cover from an impending or confirmed tornado. When this plan is implemented dispatch will follow the take cover plan as per the dispatch procedure manual. The plan is designed to notify persons in City Facilities and citizens who are outdoors in areas located in the possible track of the weather event.

### III. PROCEDURE

The greatest tornado and severe thunderstorm threats generally travel from the southwest to the northeast; however, nothing outlined in this procedure prevents independent supervisory action to more effectively warn those facing the greatest peril from an approaching storm.

#### A. STORM WATCHES & WARNINGS

When weather watches or warnings are issued by:

- National Weather Service (NWS)
- Johnson County, KS (JOCO) Emergency Management & Communications
- Overland Park Emergency Management Coordinator
- Other credible sources

Dispatch personnel will consider the type of storm being forecast and implement appropriate responses and updates as needed.

All Members will monitor developing weather events, understand their responsibilities during a storm event as outlined in this procedure and fully understand how to implement OPPD's *Take Cover Plan*.

When severe or inclement weather becomes apparent, the Watch Commander or senior Patrol Division supervisor on duty will ensure a weather alert notification page has been sent by Dispatch.

#### B. SPOTTER DUTY

Spotters should be aware the greatest tornado and severe thunderstorm threats generally, but not always, approach from the southwest. Spotter duty will be handled by trained OPPD personnel. The City Emergency Manager will be notified when OPPD spotters are activated.

If the Johnson County Storm Spotters have been activated, the City Emergency Manager will contact the on-duty Watch Commander to discuss the Police Department storm spotter response.

Spotter assignments may be made during severe thunderstorm watches/warnings and may be made during all tornado watches when conditions warrant.

The Watch Commander will monitor weather patterns to decide if OPPD storm spotters will be activated and which locations will be staffed. If a severe storm watch or warning has been issued, the Watch Commander will monitor weather conditions until the watch or warning has expired. The Watch Commander will deploy storm spotters based on severe weather conditions, NWS warnings and when JOCO has deployed weather spotters in the County.

During tornado warnings, assigned spotters will not staff the *Take Cover Plan* unless approved by a supervisor.

Suggested spotter duty locations include:

- W. 75<sup>th</sup> St. and I-35 Hwy., (cul-de-sac, west side of McDonalds or Advent Health Hospital, north side of 75<sup>th</sup> St).
- JCCC 12345 College Blvd., (south side parking garage).
- W.135<sup>th</sup> St. and Nall, Prairie Fire parking garage.
- W. 175<sup>th</sup> St. and Quivira Rd., (south or west parking lot of Blue Valley Southwest High School).

The Watch Commander will assign spotter locations based on the track of the storm, watch, or warning. The Watch Commander may assign spotters to other locations after assessing the storm's severity, direction, and available forecasts.

National Weather Service (NWS) trained spotters may be assigned to affected watch areas to better track and analyze conditions. Initial forecasts may or may not mention tornado activity; however, all spotters and field personnel should be alert for the development of sudden and unannounced tornados.

Spotters are not expected to jeopardize their personal safety and will pre-plan for the need to escape a tornado. Upon sighting or believing a tornado or funnel cloud poses a danger, spotters will report what they see to dispatchers. Spotters may decide if or when to evacuate their post for safety reasons. When a spotter evacuates, he/she will notify dispatch.

#### C. SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WATCH OR WARNING, AND TORNADO WATCH

When a Severe Thunderstorm Watch, Severe Thunderstorm Warning, or Tornado Watch has been issued, dispatchers will:

- Issue pages, per dispatch procedure manual
- Perform notifications per their procedure manual

Dispatchers will update or initiate new MDT CAD messages and Web EOC entries if spotters or field units report unusual cloud formations, severe rain, hail, or high winds.

Should Web EOC be out of service, dispatchers will utilize other communications devices to update the offices of JO CO Emergency Management & Communications and the Overland Park Emergency Management Coordinator. The primary method will be the direct phone line from Dispatch to the Office of JO CO Emergency Management & Communications, the Overland Park Emergency Manager, and the on-duty Watch Commander.

Dispatchers will repeat the above notifications when the watch/warning times change or when other pertinent weather updates are received. Notifications do not need to be made when weather advisories, watches, or warnings are terminated or expire. Terminations or expirations should be posted to Web EOC.

At the direction of the Watch Commander on duty dispatchers will assign spotters.

Personnel not assigned to spotter duty should be cognizant that severe weather can develop suddenly and without warning. Personnel will notify dispatchers when any unusual cloud formations or severe rain or hail are observed.

#### D. TORNADO WARNING

Generally, tornado warnings follow an earlier watch or warning; however, upon receipt of any Tornado Warning, dispatch personnel will follow the procedure manual checklist, and during normal business hours contact the City Hall switchboard operator by dialing 913-895-6000 #0 to notify City Hall of the storm information.

Officers assigned as field units should:

- Be familiar with siren locations
- Immediately report any siren malfunctions to Dispatch
- Suspend self-initiated activity and responses to Non-Priority 1 incidents until Dispatch issues an "all clear" or at the direction of the Watch Commander or higher authority.
- Personnel not assigned to spotter duty should be cognizant that severe weather can develop suddenly and without warning. Personnel will notify dispatchers when any unusual cloud formations or severe rain or hail are observed.

#### E. STORM SIREN ACTIVATION

The outdoor storm warning siren system consists of strategically located electronic sirens throughout Overland Park, Johnson County, and the metropolitan region, capable of activation from redundant sites. The Overland Park outdoor storm warning siren system may be activated by the JO CO, KS Office of Emergency Management & Communications, the JO CO, KS Emergency Communications Center (ECC), the JO CO, KS Sheriff's Communication Center, or remotely by the City's Emergency Management Coordinator.

#### F. TAKE COVER PLAN NOTIFICATIONS FOR SEVERE WEATHER

The take cover plan will be activated by CCC or the Watch Commander when the NWS has issued a tornado warning for the Overland Park area, the Johnson County Emergency Management &

Communications have activated the storm sirens in JOCO and the storm has the potential to enter Overland Park, OP or JOCO storm spotters report a tornado on the ground.

When the severe weather *Take Cover Plan* is activated, dispatchers will immediately:

- Announce via Radio Talk Group OP City-AG, the Severe Weather *Take Cover Plan* is in effect and Police Dispatch is accepting emergency radio traffic only.
- Ensure a steady, “wail-tone,” storm-siren signal has been activated.
- When possible, assign available non-Patrol units to cover any open districts or assist in covering districts that are considered in the tornado’s anticipated path, to complete severe weather *Take Cover Plan* notifications.
- Use all available marked field units except those assigned as spotters and those required for responses to priority one calls for service.
- Continue to make and track all take cover assignments via the CAD system until the entire City has been covered or a sergeant or higher authority directs an end to the *Take Cover Plan* alerts.
- Ensure the JO CO Emergency Management & Communications Office and City’s Emergency Management Coordinator are advised of all confirmed or unconfirmed tornado sightings in the City.
- If the JO CO Emergency Management & Communications Office is not available, relay this information directly to the NWS via the Metropolitan Emergency Radio System (MERS).
- If additional tornados or funnel-cloud sightings occur, repeat the above notification procedures until the NWS issues all-clear information.

During a Severe Weather *Take Cover Plan*, all field units equipped with emergency equipment will immediately:

- At the discretion of the Watch Commander, patrol slowly through assigned areas where the tornado is tracking or may track. While patrolling, use their PA system to notify residents a confirmed tornado is on the ground, and they should immediately take cover. Officers shall concentrate on outdoor areas such as parks, pools, playgrounds, shopping center parking areas, or other areas where large groups gather outside.
- Only self-initiate activity in emergency situations or as directed by a supervisor.
- Reserve the Primary Talk Group for emergency radio traffic until directed otherwise.

When a malfunctioning storm siren is located by field personnel, they will promptly notify and coordinate with police dispatch to ensure the Severe Weather *Take Cover Plan* is initiated, so all

people in the siren's intended warning area are sufficiently notified. Dispatch personnel will ensure all storm siren malfunctions are promptly emailed to the City's Emergency Management Coordinator.

If any significant property damage or loss of life occurs, the Watch Commander or City Emergency Management Coordinator, or higher authority should consider ordering the City Emergency Operations Plan into effect.

#### G. SHELTER-IN-PLACE PLAN FOR CITY FACILITIES

Maps designating shelter-in-place evacuation routes are displayed throughout each City facility. To prepare for a need to shelter-in-place, all Members will familiarize themselves with the shelter-in-place evacuation routes for all building areas to which they are assigned or frequent.

After a severe weather *Take-Cover-Plan* announcement, all occupants will use established evacuation routes to reach their designated shelter-in-place location, using the following designated locations:

- Myron E. Scafe Building– The concrete-reinforced storage area located in the north-east corner of the lower level.
- Sanders– The lower level hallway between the Sally port and the court prisoner elevator. Officers can remain armed if they access the hallway directly from the Sally port.
- Westgate– The Women's Locker area
- Fire Training Center– The lower level lobby area
- Tomahawk Ridge– The lower hallway adjacent to the Police Property Section.
- Blue Hawk- Fire Department gear locker room.
- OP Fleet Building- The men's and women's restrooms in the administrative area.

Police officers who are not actively assisting citizens or staff to move to Shelter-In-Place locations will promptly return to service with Dispatch and be available to handle calls for service.

To ensure building security is maintained:

- Locked doors to access the ground level at Sanders must be unlocked and kept open by Police personnel, Court supervisors or Court security officers until evacuations are completed.
- The locked doors to access the below-ground level at the Fire Training Center must be unlocked and kept open by Police or Fire personnel until evacuations are completed.

Following any Severe Weather *Take Cover Plan* announcement or Shelter-In-Place event, the highest-ranking Police employee present within the police facility will ensure:

- All occupants have heard and responded to the Severe Weather Take Cover announcement.
- A safe and orderly movement to the building's designated Shelter-In-Place area.
- Evacuees are directed away from hazards, such as flying glass or wind-tunnel effects that could occur in an area such as the upper-level Myron E. Scafe Building lobby area.
- A primary stairway monitor is assigned for those facilities with multiple levels.
- Upon the all-clear notification, employees resume normal business, and citizens are escorted to public areas.
- The City safety professional is updated on the time required with the number of people sheltered-in-place.

#### H. STORM SIREN MALFUNCTIONS

Siren malfunctions include any siren sounding when not activated, or failing to sound when properly activated.

Police dispatchers receiving reports of any siren malfunction will ensure all siren malfunctions are promptly reported to the City's Emergency Management Coordinator.

#### I. TRAINING UNIT

The Training Unit will provide annual training for severe weather to include storm spotter training, expectations after a major storm, callbacks, home preparedness, and storm spotter training.

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