

Storm Spotter Protocol

Johnson County Fire Departments, Public Safety & Sky Warn Network

Background/Notification/ Monitoring

The Johnson County Sky Warn network is comprised of Johnson County Fire Departments, Public Safety Personnel from various agencies and the Johnson County EMA RACES/ARES unit which is part of the ARRL system nationwide. During threatening weather JCOM and/or EMA, will send an E-mail and/ or a text message notification of a Severe Weather Watch to the “Severe Weather” distribution E-mail list, via the DASDEC server, this is done to alert people of a possible threat to Johnson County. Spotter activation is optional at this level.

Once the National Weather Service in the Quad Cities issues a Tornado Warning for Johnson County, then another notification E-mail and text message will be sent to that same group and the Johnson County Fire Departments will be paged by JCOM of the Tornado Warning issued by the National Weather Service.

The “JCENS” system known statewide as “Alert Iowa” as well as the EMA DASDEC servers will autogenerate these emergency weather messages to all persons in the severe weather groups. Dispatchers can manually send the messages as well but are not required to do so.

JCOM will page departments in the warned areas for the Warning. Public Safety agencies will be notified of threats via their primary radio talk groups. An event channel will be assigned for “storm watch” and public safety agencies may report their observations over that talk group. JCOM will act as net control for the public safety agencies on storm watch until relieved from that duty by Johnson County EMA staff.

The Johnson County Sky Warn Network is comprised primarily of a core group of Amateur Radio operators who have chosen to participate in the Sky Warn network and who have been trained by the National Weather Service as storm spotters.

The Johnson County EMA RACES/ARES-ARRL unit has traditionally and normally provided Net control for Storm Watch for the amateur radio community in Johnson County. As such they normally submit an activity log after the threat has subsided to Johnson County EMA within 24 hrs of the storm. That log is forwarded by EMA to the NOAA NWS Quad Cities office and a local copy is kept on file at EMA.

The RACES/ARES unit members may notify EMA, or JCOM via phone of any significant reports by calling into 319-356-6800, identifying themselves and passing on the report. JCOM and EMA can pass this report onto NWS in the Quad Cities. Alternately, members of the Sky Warn Network may elect to call the NWS Quad Cities office direct on the spotter hotline at 1-800-803-9357 and pass that report directly to them or via amateur radio.

Johnson County EMA sponsors annual storm spotter training conducted by the NOAA NWS Quad Cities office, in the spring of each year. Members of the public, public safety providers, RACES/ARES members or those wanting to be part of the Sky Warn network need to participate in training at least once every three years. Online training is also provided at either of the following links:

https://www.meted.ucar.edu/training_course.php?id=23 or at
http://www.crh.noaa.gov/dmx/presentations/spotter-training/NWS-Spotter-Training_files/frame.htm

The National Weather Service in the Quad Cities provides trained personnel a spotter number and it is encourage that members of the Sky Warn Network use that number to identify themselves when making reports. Annual class rosters and copies of certificates of completion are also kept on file by the NWS QC office and by Johnson County EMA. Online course participants should provide the local NWS office and Johnson County EMA with their certificate of completion.

For Public Safety Agencies, after notification to set storm watch, each Fire Department should designate one or more people to monitor the weather via radio, television, NOAA radio or preferably internet radar.

Activation of Public Safety Units

The Fire Chief or Senior Officer on duty, should consider deploying spotters when a severe storm is within 30 miles of their fire district or the distance of a county away from their jurisdiction (e.g. when a storm is in Iowa County or a bordering county consider deploying.) and:

- has a history of doing damage in other counties.
- has a history of Tornado Warnings or Severe Thunderstorm Warnings in other counties.
- or the Emergency Management Coordinator or JCOM has requested a deployment of spotters.

Operations

Deployed spotters should have taken the National Weather Service Storm Spotter training within the last three years, or one of the online courses listed above such as:

http://www.crh.noaa.gov/dmx/presentations/spotter-training/NWS-Spotter-Training_files/frame.htm

Deployed spotters will contact JCOM via the assigned talk group when they have significant information to report. JCOM will assign an event talk group for all weather spotting. When on duty, the Emergency Management Coordinator or their designee will coordinate weather reports on that group. If unavailable, the departments will radio in reports to JCOM for relay as needed to the NWS Davenport office. JCOM can communicate directly via phone, NAWAS Radio or via the P25 to EDACS “Dav Wx” Talk group.

Deployed Spotters should report:

- Hail of one inch in diameter or quarter size
- Wind speed or indicators of speed greater than 45 mph or large trees / branches down
- Wall Cloud rotation, Funnel Clouds, or Tornadoes that are on the ground
- Storm Damage

Spotters should:

- Should deploy in groups of no less than two
- Should seek high ground to maximize line of sight
- Should report storm activity and damage utilizing the National Weather Service criteria.
- Should use proper radio procedures.
- Always have a structure nearby chosen for emergency sheltering.

Spotters in general should **NOT**:

- Should **NOT** deploy at night unless approved by a senior officer of their agency
- Should **NOT** place themselves in the path of storms or tornadoes
- Should **NOT** participate if they feel the situation is unsafe for themselves



Johnson County Iowa has been a NOAA/NWS Storm Ready County since 2005 and is as such presently valid as such through 2017.

As such, the activities of the Sky Warn Network and the participating Public Safety Agencies, RACES/ARES-ARRL unit, and the members of the general public, all serve to enhance severe weather preparedness throughout Johnson County Iowa. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

For more information about this program contact the Johnson County Emergency Management Agency at 319-356-6700