
City Council Regular Meeting

DEPARTMENT: Fire

FROM: Joe Laster, Emergency Operations Manager

MEETING: May 5, 2025

SUBJECT:

Receive a report, hold a discussion, and provide staff direction regarding the Outdoor Warning System (OWS). (Staff Contact: Joe Laster, Emergency Operations Manager)

SUMMARY:

Burleson's Outdoor Warning System is a critical public safety tool designed to alert people *outdoors* of an imminent, life-threatening emergency—primarily severe weather events such as tornadoes, hail or extreme winds. The sirens are not intended to be heard indoors and should be viewed as part of a larger, multi-layered public notification system that includes mobile alerts, NOAA Weather Radios, social media, and local news outlets.

In August 2018, the Burleson City Council adopted the 2018 North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) severe weather warning criteria through Minute Order 879-08-2018. This decision aligned Burleson with regional best practices used across the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex, ensuring consistent and reliable public warning standards.

Under the adopted 2018 criteria, Burleson activates the OWS for the following criteria...

- The National Weather Service (NWS) issues a Tornado Warning.
- The National Weather Service Issues a Severe Thunderstorm Warning and indicates the potential for destructive winds of 70 mph or greater. A community existing in multiple counties should pay close attention to the warning area.
- Trained storm spotters have reported a tornado in the jurisdiction, or in a neighboring jurisdiction that has the potential to affect your community. (Each community should determine satisfactory methods for verifying tornado activity reports.)
- Hail of 1.5" in diameter or greater. The size of hail that warrants OWS activation may be adjusted at the discretion of local officials in the event of special situations such as large outdoor public gatherings where the potential for injury is increased.
- Other emergency as directed by the community's designated public safety officials.

The shift from the previous 2012 criteria—which had a 1.25-inch hail threshold—was made to reduce unnecessary activations and enhance the credibility of alerts. While the numerical change may seem small, the practical effect has been a measurable decrease in false or low-level activations, reducing alert fatigue and reinforcing the urgency of each warning.

As part of our long-term investment in public safety and emergency communications, the City of Burleson is in the final phases of a comprehensive upgrade and expansion of the Outdoor Warning System. This project involves replacing the city's original siren infrastructure—now over 20 years old—with modern, more reliable siren technology.

When complete, the project will have:

- Replaced all eleven legacy sirens with state-of-the-art units
- Added five new sirens to expand geographic coverage and address gaps in high-growth areas
- Improved sound projection in outdoor public spaces, parks, and developing neighborhoods

These upgrades are guided by sound propagation modeling and demographic analysis to ensure optimal placement and performance. The result will be a more resilient and far-reaching system that enhances outdoor notification capability and strengthens our city's overall emergency readiness.

RECOMMENDATION:

N/A

PRIOR ACTION/INPUT (Council, Boards, Citizens):

N/A

REFERENCE:

N/A

FISCAL IMPACT:

N/A

STAFF CONTACT:

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