

OUTDOOR WARNING SYSTEM FACTSHEET AND FAQs

Overview

- The City and County of Denver’s Outdoor Warning Siren System was installed between 2012 and 2014. This system replaced the old civil defense sirens that had been in place for more than 40 years.
- There are 86 sirens citywide: 75 in the city and 11 at Denver International Airport (DEN).
- The sirens are primarily used for tornado warnings, but can be used for any emergency where the public needs to seek shelter quickly.
- The sirens are tested on the second Wednesday of every month at 11:00 am.



When the Sirens Sound

- When you hear Outdoor Warning Siren System, you should seek shelter and seek information.
- If you are outside, you should seek shelter indoors, preferably in a stairwell, basement, or the lowest building level. If there is no basement, go to the center of an interior room on the lowest level (closet, interior hallway) away from windows, doors, and outside walls. Put as many walls as possible between you and the outside. Do not open windows.
- Once you are inside a secure location, tune to local media (TV, radio, mobile device, etc.) or NOAA weather alert radio to be informed of the storm location, path and the duration of the warning.
- There is no “All Clear” sound that the sirens make, nor does the National Weather Service (NWS) issue an all clear message. Once the warning period has expired or is cancelled, it is safe to leave your shelter location. Be aware, however, that the NWS may extend the warning or issue a new warning at any time, so remain vigilant.
- The NWS is the only official source of severe weather warnings/watches, including tornados. All tornado warnings are initiated by the NWS. However, the City and County of Denver may sound the sirens without a NWS issued warning if a tornado has been sighted by trained observers.
- During a real emergency, the sirens will sound for 3 minutes at a time. Depending on how long the warning period lasts, the sirens may be resounded multiple times throughout the warning period

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Testing

- The sirens are tested on the second Wednesday of every month at 11am.
- The monthly tests are only a short “bump” test of the sirens, where they will sound for only a few seconds and then fade away. This allows us to verify the sirens are working without having to sound them at full volume, minimizing disruption.
- To hear what the sirens sound like during the monthly bump test, go to: http://www.alertnotification.net/sites/ans/files/downloads/DC_SirenWail.wav
- Additionally, siren testing will take place at dates and times other than the second Wednesday for sound level testing and maintenance. OEM will issue a media release the day before this type of testing with the locations and time frame of the tests.

Other Alerts

- Due to evolving technology, alerts from the NWS may hit different warning devices (smartphones, TV, radio, etc.) at different times. You may receive an alert on your mobile device, hear a message on your TV/radio, or hear outdoor warning sirens at different times. You should always take protective actions at the first alert you receive. Do not wait for additional alerts before taking action.



FAQs/Concerns

I used to be able to hear the monthly test, but why not anymore?

The monthly tests are short “bump” tests where the sirens only sound for a few seconds before fading away. The siren head slowly rotates 360 when sounding. Unless the siren head is pointed right at you when it sounds for those few seconds or you are within a couple of blocks, you likely will not hear the test. The monthly test of the old sirens was a full three minute sounding, so they were much more likely to be heard.

Should I be able to hear the sirens inside my home or office building?

Generally no. The sirens are loud (130db at 100ft), but are not designed to be heard indoors. If you're within a couple of blocks of a siren, you may hear them indoors, but their intent is to be heard by people outside.

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Why did I hear sirens going off, but there is no tornado warning?

Several possibilities. It may be a siren test day. Tests are the second Wednesday of the month at 11:00am, but the City and County of Denver will occasionally do additional testing on other dates and times. You can call 3-1-1 to ask if the sirens are being tested.

Another possibility is you are hearing sirens from another city. Aurora, Commerce City, Lakewood, and Englewood all have outdoor siren systems similar to Denver. If you live near the border, you may be hearing their sirens.

Some large machinery with high speed motors like woodchippers can sound similar to our sirens. Also some buildings have alarm systems that will sound like the outdoor warning sirens as well.

I can barely hear the sirens near my home/office/school. What can be done about this?

If you believe the sirens near your home/office/school are not loud enough to hear outdoors, you can bring this to the attention of OEM by calling 3-1-1. Be sure to document when (specific date & time) you heard them or believe you should have heard them and didn't, as well as the address of the location you were at. We cannot troubleshoot or address your concern without this specific information.

How did the City decide where to put the sirens?

Siren locations were chosen based on several factors, the most important of which is the ability to provide optimal, uniform coverage throughout the entire city. Other factors include southern exposure for solar panels, elevation, proximity and height of adjacent structures, underground and overhead utilities, conforming to statutes and ordinances, and accessibility for installation and maintenance. We made every effort to avoid placing the sirens immediately adjacent to private residences. Most are placed in the public right-of-way next to schools, parks, fire stations, and commercial and public facilities. However, in some neighborhoods, it was impossible to avoid placement near residences without having gaps in sound coverage.

Can I request the City to move a siren or add a siren?

In certain circumstances the City will consider moving sirens. However, moving sirens is costly and time consuming as there are only a few vendors in the country that have the collective expertise to install the siren head, radio system, solar panels, batteries, etc. To have one moved requires advanced budgeting, permitting, and scheduling. Additionally, moving a siren a block or two would do little to minimize the sound – sirens are meant to be loud!

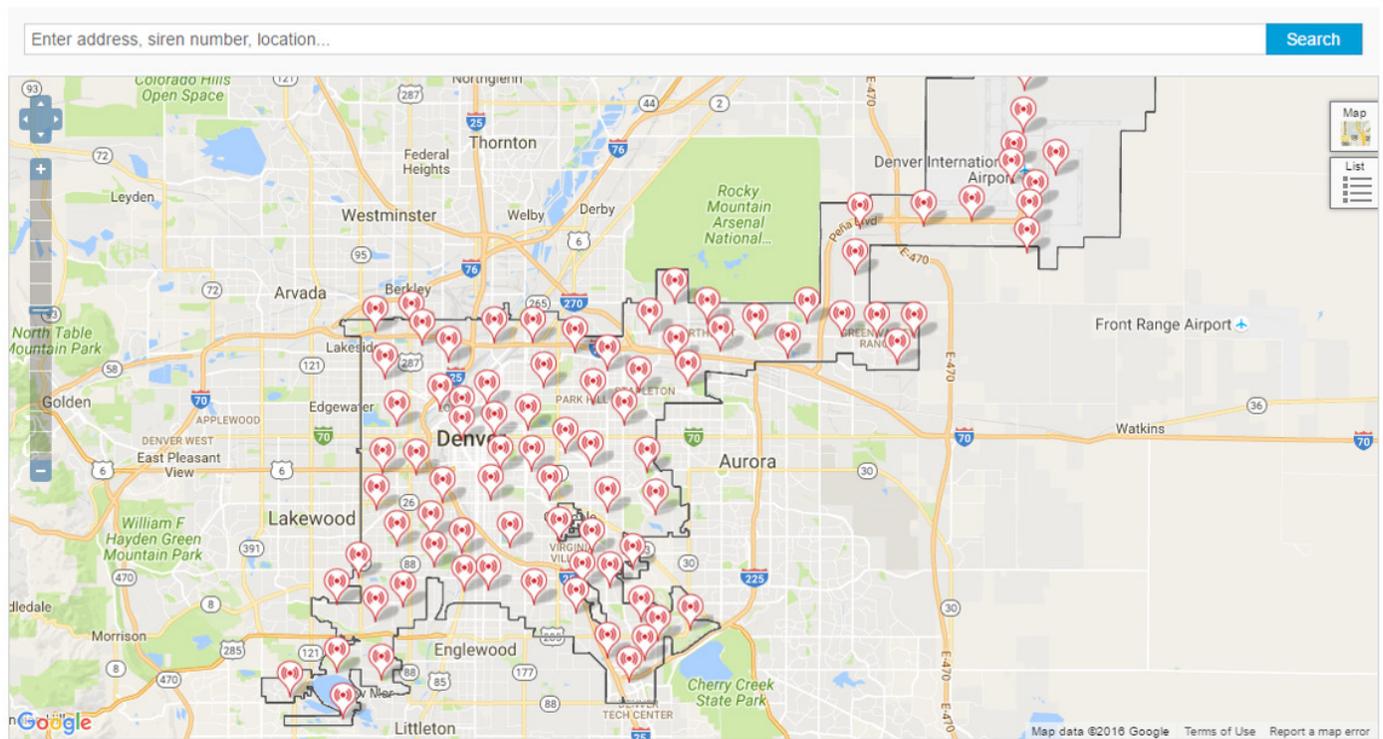
Based on sound testing results, the City has added additional sirens in areas where siren sound coverage was less than optimal in the past year. If you believe a siren should be added in a certain

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area, you can contact OEM via 3-1-1 to report this. Please keep in mind that adding sirens is costly and time consuming. Before we would consider adding a siren, we would perform sound testing and analysis to determine if it is required.

Outdoor Warning Sirens

Outdoor Warning Sirens in City and County of Denver.



When is it all clear or safe to come out of sheltering?

Unfortunately, the NWS does not issue an all clear after a tornado warning. Rather, each of their warnings carries a start and end time. So unless the warning is extended, reissued, or cancelled, it will just expire when the end time comes. Therefore, it is very important to monitor local media or the NWS to know if anything has changed. We encourage schools, office buildings, and other large facilities to have their facility managers or safety personnel monitor the media, NOAA weather radio, or other reliable information sources and alert the facility tenants when the warning has passed.