

## Frequently Asked Questions

### City-Wide Emergency Siren Warning System

#### Why did the City replace the existing system?

The old system consisted of 3 sirens that were purchased in the 1960s with an estimated coverage of 9% of the community. The City has been fortunate with the performance of the sirens, but as they fail, parts are difficult to secure.

#### What makes the new system better?

The new system consists of 5 sirens strategically located to provide **coverage for the entire community**. All of the components are electronic with no moving parts. The sirens are powered by batteries that are recharged from solar panels.

The system also provides voice capabilities. While this feature will be used in a limited capacity, we will include a "this is a test" message during any mandated quarterly or annual testing. Practical applications for voice messages would be a hazardous materials incident or an evacuation order. The voice capabilities could be used to provide directions to the residents.

#### Where are the sirens located?

- Entrance road to the Immaculate Conception Church property
- Next to the Cherry Street water tower
- Bethany United Methodist Church property
- Next to the bulk water sales building off Admiral Trost Drive
- Behind the Department of Public Works building

#### What are the tones?

All three tones can be heard via the 3 links below.

Tornado - [Alert](#)

Fire Call - [Wail](#)

Noon and 6 - [Westminster Chimes](#)

#### Why do I hear church bells at Noon and 6:00 p.m.?

One of the components of an effective warning system is to have distinct and easily recognized tones (sirens) for each type of event. It was decided to keep the standard "alert" tone for tornado warnings. Working with the Columbia Fire Department, the "wail" tone was chosen for fire calls since it closely resembles an emergency response siren. The remaining tone, the Noon and 6:00 p.m. tone, needed to be distinctly different from the other two. With the increased coverage area, it was decided a more subtle tone should be used. As a result, the church bells (Westminster Chimes) were selected.

#### Why do I hear the church bells but do not hear the fire call alerts?

While the system is fully functional, we are waiting for the completion of software development that will allow the dispatchers in the telecommunications office to select the fire call and tornado alerts by clicking an icon, versus entering a series of manual codes via the system control panel.

#### Are there any informational sessions available regarding the new system?

The Emergency Management Agency of Columbia previously conducted 3 informational sessions that were open to the public. Additional sessions have not been planned. However, if enough interest is expressed, EMA will schedule additional sessions.