

Upgraded warning sirens ready for action

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Village that considered scrapping bad-weather sirens is now happy to have high-tech system donated by company

It took some time, but the Village of Saukville finally has an upgraded siren system in place to warn of nasty weather heading the community's way.

Early last year, village officials considered scrapping the storm-warning sirens that are old and destined to become obsolete at the end of this year when new federal low-band signal rules go into effect.

The rationale was that the pole-mounted sirens are no longer needed in the digital age. Smart phones and e-mail warnings keep most people alert to approaching foul weather, some officials argued.

Emergency Management Director Jack Morrison noted that the village also faced ongoing expenses for maintaining the five sirens and supplying them with electricity.

Morrison asked whether spending that money makes sense when many people spend their days in air-conditioned homes and offices where they cannot hear the sirens.

Village trustees were saved from having to make a tough political decision on whether to replace the siren system when a Milwaukee siren company, American Signal, offered to update the warning system at no cost.

That offer was made last year, but a series of weather-related calamities elsewhere in the country kept the company from following through on its promise to Saukville until late this summer.

The Public Safety Committee was told this month that three upgraded sirens that comply with the new regulations are in place and ready to sound the alert.

They are located near the Walmart store, in Quade Park and in the village's industrial park.

"The company did the installation work this summer, and we had to test the sirens several times during the week. That resulted in a number of calls from the concerned citizens of Saukville asking about what was happening, but at least we knew the sirens were working," Morrison said.

He said he is impressed with the system and the advanced capabilities it brings to the village. That includes an activation system that gives the village and the Ozaukee County Sheriff's Department the ability to trigger the sirens.

"The new system comes with a central video screen that allows us to monitor which sirens are sounding and which ones might be having a problem," Morrison said.

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The control system also logs who trips the sirens and how long they run. Each siren has a heating system, ensuring the equipment is in optimal operating condition even in the worst weather.

Weekly system checks are run automatically, although that process does not require sounding the alarms.

“The system comes with a lot more capabilities than we are using now, but if the budget picture ever eases up, I am sure we will be able to find ways to use them,” Morrison said.

He said value of the upgraded system is about \$15,000. If replacement sirens had been required, it could have cost \$50,000.

Morrison said he is glad the debate has been resolved.

“I felt embarrassed for the village because we took some heat simply because we were looking at ways to save taxpayer money. Thanks to the donation by American Signal, our warning system is now as good as any out there,” he said.

The system has yet to be triggered because of approaching storms, but Morrison said he knows it is just a matter of time.

“I am thankful that the new system is up and ready, but I honestly hope we never have to use it,” he said. “It is a lot like the fire department — it is nice to know it is there if you need it, but you hope you never do.”