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NEWS RELEASE

Date: March 9, 2016
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Statewide Severe Weather Tornado Drill

Severe Weather Awareness Week – March 13-19, 2016

Emergency Management agencies in Taney County, including the Cities of Branson and Forsyth will join the National Weather Service and other emergency managers across the state on Tuesday, March 15, for the annual Statewide Severe Weather Tornado Drill at 1:30 p.m. This special event is designed to test emergency outdoor warning sirens, activation of NOAA Weather Radios (All-Hazards Risk Radios) and to educate the public about severe weather safety with one key goal – to save lives.

Educating the public is one of the key factors in promoting safety as the severe weather season approaches. “We encourage folks to become familiar with the key terms used by the National Weather Service,” stated Branson Fire Chief and Emergency Management Director Ted Martin. Remember that a thunderstorm or tornado **watch** means simply to watch the sky and to monitor changes in weather conditions. A thunderstorm or tornado **warning** means to take shelter immediately.

Stay Informed! Weather information is being disseminated to the public even quicker now with advancements in weather technology and communications with the public. “As watches and warnings are issued, we encourage the public to watch for changing weather conditions and to stay informed as pertinent information is passed on quickly through the media resources and weather alert radios,” stated Chris Berndt, Taney County Emergency Management Director.

“One key tool to stay informed is by using the resources of a NOAA Weather Radio,” stated Martin. These radios provide instant and up-to-date weather information and severe weather warnings provided by the National Weather Service and may be programmed to activate for the specific county that you live in. They may also be activated for all-hazards risks including flash flooding, extreme cold and heat weather conditions and may even be activated for AMBER Alerts. These radios may be purchased for around \$30.00 at many retailers.

There are also twenty-three outdoor warning sirens located throughout the City of Branson. These sirens are tested monthly and maintained by fire department personnel. “Citizens do need to realize outdoor warning sirens are designed to primarily warn people located outdoors near area attractions such as golf courses, city parks, and school athletic facilities, for example,” stated Martin. Outdoor warning sirens are also located in the communities of Forsyth, Taneyville, and Merriam Woods.

One additional resource provided by the City of Branson to help keep the public informed about severe weather and other emergency incidents is a phone-based system called “BransonALERTS.” This system is designed to place automated calls to residential and business phones in the City limits of Branson. This service now provides instant weather warnings and can even be sent to cellular phones, text messages, and e-mail. The public can learn more about and sign up for this free program on the City web site at www.bransonmo.gov.

Be Prepared – Know Where to Go! Being prepared and taking shelter are some of the top priorities if you are at home, school or work in the event of a severe storm or tornado. “Identify and use a place of shelter for home, work, and school – typically the lowest level of the building, preferably in an interior room with no windows. Try to get out of large open buildings to avoid injury should the roof collapse. Mobile homes and vehicles provide virtually no shelter in the event of a tornado. People should exit the mobile home and abandon a vehicle to seek shelter in a more secure building or low area such as a ditch then cover their head with their arms, coat or blanket,” added Berndt.

The Cities of Branson and Forsyth have achieved the designation as a “Storm Ready Community” by the National Weather Service in Springfield. This certification was obtained after the fire departments demonstrate ability to secure redundant warning systems, established education programs for the community, and the ability to deliver timely weather information for severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, flash flooding, and even severe winter weather warnings. As a commercial business, the Branson Airport has taken preparedness steps to become designated as a “Storm Ready Supporter” by the National Weather Service as well. The City of Branson was the eighth City in Missouri to be designated “Storm Ready.”

For additional safety tips about severe weather, fire safety, or to learn more about “BransonALERTS,” contact the City of Branson Fire Department at (417) 243-2790 or on the web at www.bransonmo.gov. Taney County Emergency Management may be reached at (417) 546-7233 or on the web at www.co.taney.mo.us.

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