

## Maui & Thermopolis – One person’s take-aways

**The Questions:** Why didn’t the siren go off in Maui? Did it malfunction? Was the failure to sound the alarm due to someone waiting for permission? What was the protocol? Are there lessons for us in Thermopolis?

**The Protocol:** According to my friend from Hawaii who visited last week, there was only one siren – a tsunami siren that signaled people to leave coastal areas. The **protocol** was that when people heard the siren, they were to **turn on their radios and listen to instructions**. This protocol was supposed to be **rehearsed monthly**. What failed?

**A Contributing Factor:** In the event, the authorities hesitated to sound the tsunami siren due to a concern that, upon hearing it, people would **not** turn on their radios to listen to instructions but would run from coastal areas and into the path of the inland fire that was rapidly spreading due to high winds and many acres of dry fuel. Making matters worse, there were no protocols to cut off power to affected power lines, so as lines fell, more fires started and were fueled by the high winds.

**Thermopolis:** This story caused me to review what our protocols in Thermopolis are.

**We have two sirens:** a severe weather siren and a dam failure siren. As in the case of Maui, one can imagine emergency situations that would not fall under either of these categories. What siren would be used in the case of a toxic spill that required immediate evacuation, an active shooter, or shooters in multiple locations, or some other mass emergency event besides severe weather or a dam failure?

**Protocols:** We are told to

- Expect **CodeRed** information

We are encouraged to sign up for Code Red so that we will receive phone alerts. What if phones are down, Code Red alerts can’t come through, and all we have for information is a radio?

We are told to

- Tune to radio station KYTS, 105.7 FM
- Watch your cable TV interrupt
- Listen to your noaa all-hazards radio (ch 5, 162.500 mhz)

**Are We Ready?** How many of us have a NOAA all-hazards radio? Do we know what NOAA SAME is? How many of us have any radio at all? How many of us have pre-programmed the channels to the radio stations we need in an emergency? How many of us have those stations on a handy card taped to the radio to refer to in an emergency?

**Take-away: In an emergency, we do what we practice.** The Emergency Preparedness Fair is an opportunity to 1) Get more NOAA SAME radios in more people’s homes, 2) Get them programmed, 3) Increase awareness of the importance of responding to sirens by **practicing** turning on our radios to listen for information and instructions.

My take-away from my friend’s story is that we need to make sure everyone understands **the importance of having a radio**, including a NOAA SAME all-hazards radio, and **knowing how to use it** when we hear a siren, and **practice using it** when the sirens are tested. Instead of getting on Facebook, **turn on the radio and tune into the official channels for updates and instructions**. In an emergency, if power is down, we may not have Facebook, but we will most likely be able to access information on our NOAA radio.

**When we hear the test sirens:** We should practice turning on our radios and listening for instructions.