



Decision making by Austin, Texas, residents in hypothetical tornado scenarios

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The purpose of The Warning Project survey was to understand how people receive warnings of hazardous weather and subsequently use this information to make decisions. Five hundred nineteen surveys were returned from Austin, Texas, residents. Most Austin respondents had experiences, sometimes traumatic, with hazardous weather, and 90% understood that a warning represented a greater threat than a watch. Most respondents preferred to be warned about tornadoes through sirens at night, and by sirens, local radio, and television during the daytime. These results show that the increasing trend towards nonlocal radio programming may jeopardize the safety of the high percentages of people that depend on local radio stations for tornado warnings. Rather high percentages of respondents stated that personal contact through phone calls or knocks on their doors would be the best way to warn them about tornadoes. Emergency managers should understand that such expectations exist in the public and manage these efforts accordingly. The survey results indicate the public has a potentially high tolerance for false alarms and close calls for tornado warnings with about 90% responding that they prefer more warnings even if it means more false alarms or close calls, suggesting the cry-wolf scenario is not as important as previously thought.

Part of The Warning Project survey presented respondents with two hypothetical scenarios and asked questions about their expected behavior. These scenarios were a tornado warning issued while the respondent was home and a tornado visible by the respondent while driving. Most people made safe decisions in the scenarios, except

for nearly half the respondents who said that they would seek shelter from a tornado under a highway overpass. If Austin is representative of other cities in tornado alley, more education is needed on not seeking shelter under highway overpasses. Logistic regression models were constructed to model the behavior of people in the two tornado scenarios. These models indicate the relative roles of gender, age, and socioeconomic status in decision making in these two scenarios.