

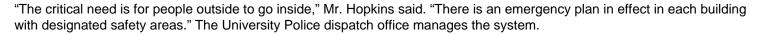
# Getting the Alarm Out: USM's Tornado Warning System

## **Full Mitigation Best Practice Story**

## Forrest County, Mississippi

**Hattiesburg, MS** - Prior to 1998, students at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) were largely dependent upon "word of mouth" information when tornadoes threatened the campus.

According to Bob Hopkins, USM Chief of Security, the university recognized the need for a campus-wide tornado warning system when several alerts failed to reach a considerable portion of the 16,000 students enrolled.



University Officials say the system operates similarly to a radio or wireless system. "If a tornado warning is issued for our area, the University Police dispatcher calls the Emergency Management District to confirm the tornado is a threat to our campus. At that point, we set the alarm off," Mr. Hopkins explained.

The most noticeable feature of the new system is its prominent position on top of Owings-McQuagge Hall. The radio-controlled warning system has two components: 1) an alarm characterized by Westminster Chimes, and 2) a voice system which announces, "A tornado warning has been issued for the Hattiesburg area. Please seek shelter."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency contributed \$21,902 of the \$29,202 cost to install the warning system through its Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), which is administered by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. Following a major disaster declaration, the HMGP funds up to 75 percent of the eligible costs of a project that will reduce or eliminate damages from future natural hazard events.

"Students are acquainted with the system during risk management orientation. Each residence hall gets a copy of the Emergency Response Manual," Mr. Hopkins noted. He is pleased with the system's effectiveness.

During Hurricane Katrina (2005), approximately 1,800 students remained sheltered on USM's campus

#### **Activity/Project Location**

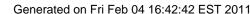
Geographical Area: Single County in a State

FEMA Region: Region IV

State: Mississippi

County: Forrest County

City/Community: Hattiesburg



## **Key Activity/Project Information**

Sector: Public

Hazard Type: Tornado

Activity/Project Type: Warning Systems

Activity/Project Start Date: **09/1999**Activity/Project End Date: **03/2000** 

Funding Source: Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)

Funding Recipient: Academic

Funding Recipient Name: University of Southern Mississippi

Application/Project Number: 9999

#### **Activity/Project Economic Analysis**

Cost: \$29,202.00 (Estimated)

Non FEMA Cost:

### **Activity/Project Disaster Information**

Mitigation Resulted From Federal

Disaster? Unknown

Value Tested By Disaster? Unknown

Repetitive Loss Property? Unknown

### **Reference URLs**

Reference URL 1: http://www.msema.org

Reference URL 2: http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/hmgp/index.shtm

#### **Main Points**

- The University of Mississippi recognized the need for a campus-wide tornado warning system.
- During Hurricane Katrina (2005), approximately 1,800 students remained sheltered on USM's campus.
- The radio-controlled warning system has two components: 1) an alarm characterized by Westminster Chimes, and 2) a voice system which announces, "A tornado warning has been issued for the Hattiesburg area. Please seek shelter."



Tornado warning system on top of Owings-McQuagge Hall.



Entrance to the University of Southern Mississippi.