

## University and City of Oxford Declared Storm Ready by NWS

Contributed by Jennifer Farish  
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OXFORD, Miss. - The city of Oxford and the University of Mississippi were granted StormReady certification by the National Weather Service during a ceremony Monday at Oxford City Hall.

UM is among 29 other universities across the country to achieve the status and joins the University of Southern Mississippi as the only Mississippi universities to earn the certification. There are 28 StormReady designations statewide.

"I think that this is important because it lets the public know that the university has put a great deal of time, thought and effort into preparing for violent weather," said UM Dean of Students Sparky Reardon. "We are continually monitoring our readiness and our needs in hopes of providing safety measures for our campus community."

Participating in Monday's StormReady ceremony are (left to right) Richard Okulski, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Memphis; UM Executive Director of Brand Marketing and Communications Jim Ebel; Jim Belles, meteorologist-in-charge for NWS in Memphis; Oxford Mayor Richard Howorth; and Oxford alderman Janice Antonow. UM photo by Kevin Bain.

Officials from the city and university were present to receive formal letters of recognition from NWS. The StormReady program was established in Tulsa, Okla., in 1999 and is a nationwide community preparedness effort that uses a grassroots approach to help communities develop plans to handle local severe weather and flooding threats, according to NWS. The designation lasts for three years and includes authorization to use the StormReady logo on university and city signs.

In order to be recognized, a community must establish a 24-hour warning point and emergency operations center; have more than one way to receive severe weather forecasts and warnings to alert the public; create a system that monitors local weather conditions; promote the importance of public readiness through community seminars; and develop a formal hazardous weather plan, including trained severe weather spotters; and hold emergency exercises, according to NWS.

Jimmy Allgood, city of Oxford emergency manager, assisted the university in preparing the StormReady application. He said the designation signifies the awareness of Oxford and university leaders and citizens regarding the threat of severe weather.

"This shows that we are willing to put forth the effort to become more weather alert and more prepared for the sake of the community," he said.

According to NWS, 90 percent of all presidentially declared disasters are weather related, leading to around 500 deaths per year and nearly \$14 billion in damage. In addition, Americans face an average of 10,000 thunderstorms, 5,000 floods and 1,000 tornadoes each year. Because of the threat and dangers of severe weather, the StormReady program helps community leaders and emergency managers strengthen local safety programs and better communicate with citizens.

Jim Belles, meteorologist-in-charge at the NWS forecast office in Memphis, said residents of the Mid-South live in an area that regularly experiences thunderstorms and tornadoes.

"Because of that, you have to be extra vigilant as a community," he said. "The StormReady program is a very effective way of doing that."

Belles said the designation is a testament to the weather-consciousness of the Oxford and university communities. Some 1,500 communities and universities nationwide have met the program's requirements.

The measures put in place by the city and university to prepare for severe weather already have made a difference, Belles said. In February 2008, a tornado hit the Caterpillar manufacturing plant just north of Oxford. Because of an early warning system, no employees were killed or seriously injured as a result of the storm.

"We are seeing in communities that are StormReady that it is making a difference in terms of mitigating loss of life and property," Belles said.

Signs with StormReady logos will be placed at entrances to the university and major roads into the city to reassure residents, students and parents that the city and university are prepared to deal with a weather-related event, said Jim Windham, UM's director of procurement services and emergency management coordinator.

Watch video.

"It will give reassurance to the citizens of Oxford, and especially to the parents who are sending their children to the university, that we are aware of weather-related incidents and we are prepared for them."

The achievement is due to the work of many dedicated individuals, Windham said.

"A lot of good people have stepped up and joined this effort, and through a unified front, we have been able to establish important strategic planning for the city and university."

The StormReady program and a similar TsunamiReady program are part of the NOAA National Weather Service's working partnership with the International Association of Emergency Managers, the National Emergency Management Association and the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program.

For more information on the StormReady program, visit <http://www.stormready.noaa.org> .