

## **Madison County SKYWARN/STORMNET - A History**

The severe weather observation program for Madison County developed along with the local Amateur Radio VHF repeater and the communications advantages it offered. Amateurs of our County had supported the local Civil Defense organization since the early 50's and with the increase in popularity of the FM communications mode, the construction of a repeater and the availability of "police scanners" the basic items were in place to develop a successful network. Nationally a fledgling SKYWARN concept was developing and our County was anxious to participate as a means of public service.

In the summer of 1971 the basic concepts and organization of the SKYWARN Network developed. Severe weather alerts provided a chance to try out different organizational concepts. Initial discussions with the Sheriff's department and the Anderson Fire dispatch leadership about allowing an Amateur in the dispatch points were held and a plan was accepted as a way to improve the sounding of the warning sirens in Anderson.

The first observer training classes were held in the spring of 1972 with many active amateurs participating. Through the 70's the annual training was held in early March utilizing local weather experts, weathermen, and information from the National Weather Service. In the late 70's a "tone alert board" was developed for observer monitor receivers that would alert our amateur radio weather observers at any hour. Presentations were made to clubs and civic organizations explaining CD and the overall SKYWARN program.

Throughout the '80s annual training sessions were held for the benefit of the amateur operator observers. New information was made available resulting in an increased knowledge of severe weather by the observers and Warning Division members who were analyzing the reports. A Countywide warning system was implemented on the Civil Defense commercial radio system and receivers were placed in county facilities, at each broadcast radio station in the county and at each school system administrative office. Amateurs acted as "observers" during the school tornado drills. Countywide observation points and the overall communications procedures were solidified during this time. Amateur interest continued to be high with nearly 100 people at the yearly training sessions. The recognition of the program increased as a result of presentations on the local radio stations and a method of "breaking into" the Anderson cable TV system with emergency announcements.

In the '90's a major effort was made to interest volunteer fire departments and town police departments in the training and monitoring of the network. Training sessions saw from 7 to 15 different departments represented. Training was presented by TV weathermen, the National Weather Service and Warning Division staff on a rotating basis. Each year the observers were updated with handouts and refreshers of operating policies and procedures. Alert monitors were purchased by the County Emergency Management and distributed to the County government facilities and schools. Business and industry was encouraged to obtain warning receivers and many did. Throughout this decade the participation by Amateurs was outstanding. A typical alert for severe weather would result in 35 to 50 participants. The EOC was regularly activated to coordinate the network and

the Sheriff's department dispatch system played an active role by communicating with the network on the EMA commercial channels. Information flowed freely between observers and first responder agencies.

The year 2000 continued the training requirements of the Amateurs and the active participation and acceptance by police and fire services. The name of the program was changed from SKYWARN to STORMNET to emphasize all severe weather occurrences not just tornado risks. Support by volunteer fire departments was outstanding with most monitoring the network during all severe weather occurrences. Madison County was recognized in 2001 as a "Storm Ready Community" supported by the structure that had been developed over the years by the SKYWARN/Stormnet program. Our StormNet Training classes were conducted primarily by Meteorologists from the Indianapolis Office of the National Weather Service. Their Office provided high quality presentations updated each year with video and pictures of actual Indiana severe weather.

As Madison County continues with 47 years of severe weather observation the support continues. In addition to the many police, fire, CERT and other first responders nearly 200 local hams have participated in the training and we have 50 who have received training or updates within the last three years. Hams link our County to the National Weather Service statewide network and assist in weather analysis. This high level of organization and participation results in the Madison County StormNet being viewed as a benchmark program nationwide.