

What to do when you hear the sound of siren?

Sirens are a means of warning people when there is a threat of danger. Each person should know the existing types of signals and their meaning, and mainly what to do in the case of danger. The Fire Rescue Service of the South Moravian Region in partnership with the Police of the Czech Republic – the city police headquarters of Brno and Diocesan Charity of Brno offers you some basic information about how to distinguish certain types of sounds of sirens one from another, and how to behave when the siren goes off.

Functions of warning system and its purpose

In the Czech Republic there is an established public warning system covering nearly 100% of all residential areas of our country. It mainly consists of sirens, but also public address systems, which are connected to a remote control or operated by hand/locally. Some of the sirens (electronic ones) "can speak", i.e. after the signal is issued, distressed information is pronounced. Similarly it applies to certain public address systems (which function as local information systems).



Fig.: electronic siren

Most of sirens are old-type sirens (rotary). They "toot" only, and after the signal is issued, it is impossible to inform the inhabitants of such village/town about the type of danger via the siren. That is why it is important to be able to distinguish particular types of signals.

All the system serves as warning of endangered population when immediate hiding or evacuation is necessary. Since 2001 in the Czech Republic there have applied only **one warning signal** "General warning" which tells you that "something is happening" and it is up to you to get quickly to a safe place and find out more information.

What type of signals can you hear?

General warning – this signal announces that there is a danger and may sound at any time during the day and night. "General warning" signal is a warble tone of 140 seconds' duration and it may sound 3 times in a row. In case of "talking" siren it is followed by information about the type of danger, e.g. danger of flood wave. In any case, you will hear the particular emergency information from the public address system, from the police/firemen outside broadcasting car, or also from the radio and television.

Siren test – this is a signal which you will hear most often, usually every first Wednesday of each month at 12:00 at midday. It serves to check the function of the system and audibility of sirens. If you cannot hear “your” siren in your place of living at that time, report it to particular municipality or to the fire brigade. “Siren test” signal is an uninterrupted tone of 140 seconds’ duration. In case of “talking” sirens and some public address systems it is completed by “**Siren test**” saying. So, Siren test is not a warning signal!

Fire alarm – this signal serves only for calling down voluntary fire rescue teams to set out for action. “Fire alarm” signal is a **once-interrupted tone of 60 seconds’ duration**, in the case of electric siren imitating the sound of fire horn – FI-RE!, FI-RE! Fire alarm is also not a warning signal. When you hear this sound, we just recommend you to find out whether the potential fire or other emergency is taking place in your close surrounding. If it does not endanger you, stay calm and do nothing unless you are asked by the rescue squad.

You can listen to the real sounds of sirens at www.firebrno.cz/jak-zni-sirena (in MP3 audio format)

What to do when you hear the “General warning” signal?

Find a shelter

First try to find a shelter in any nearby building (even when you are driving, stop and find a shelter). The building, which you use as a shelter, must have lockable rooms. Choose the rooms without windows in the middle of the building, and avoid the basement. Some chemicals are heavier than the air, so the space under the surface would be dangerous to life. If you are in unfamiliar environment, do not be afraid to ask for help and letting you in a building. And visa versa – offer your own shelter to everyone who needs that.



Fig.: Sealing windows with a tape

Warning - in certain cases do not hide in buildings! In the case of flood emergency find an elevated place (such as a hill or hillside). Find and stay at an open space, e.g. in case of a vast (e.g. forest) fire, landslide, earthquake (common in the Mediterranean), or suchlike.

Make the shelter resistant

The room, where you hide, needs to be isolated from the outer environment. This is important especially in case of leakage of chemicals or radioactive material. First, close the windows and doors. Turn of the ventilation system and/or air-conditioning and block the ventilation

openings and window frames. Mind to stop up the gap under the doors. You can use tapes or e.g. blankets. If you have no other options, use your own clothes. You will find the best methods of taking precautions for an improvised shelter on web pages given down at the bottom of this article.

Obtain information

First find out the type of danger there is. By no means make phone calls, especially not to emergency lines. In case of extensive emergency you will obtain all the important information from TV and the radio – especially ČT1 and ČRo 1 Radiožurnál, or potentially from the public address system or from the involved rescued squad.

If you have no TV or radio in the building, there will probably be someone who will have a Discman, MP3 player or mobile phone containing FM radio receiver. Next, follow the instructions from TV and radio or the involved rescued squad.



Fig.: Receiving information from the radio

Would you like to learn more about how to act correctly in emergency? Within the project of "Vaše cesty k bezpečí" (Your ways to safety) The Fire Rescue Service of the South Moravian Region in partnership with the Police of the Czech Republic – the city police headquarters of Brno and Diocesan Charity of Brno offers you more advices of our smart blondes, who will give you instructions at our web pages www.firebrno.cz/EN how to solve other situations endangering your safety, health, life and possessions.