



ILLINOIS TOLLWAY NEWS

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NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE RECOGNIZES ILLINOIS TOLLWAY AS “STORMREADY” TO RESPOND TO SEVERE WEATHER

Program recognizes public and private institutions prepared to handle extreme weather events

DOWNERS GROVE, IL – The Illinois Tollway was recognized today by the National Weather Service as “StormReady” for being well-prepared to respond quickly and effectively to dangerous weather conditions on any of the five roadways that make up the 294-mile Tollway system in Northern Illinois.

“The Illinois Tollway has demonstrated it has the resources and capabilities to save lives and protect property before, during and after extreme weather events,” Mike Bardou, warning coordination meteorologist, Chicago National Weather Service, said in a formal presentation today at Tollway headquarters in Downers Grove. “Being recognized as StormReady, means the Tollway is prepared to manage extreme weather events through advanced planning, effective communication and situational awareness.”

The StormReady program was developed by the National Weather Service, which is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and provides weather, water and climate data, as well as forecasts, warnings and impact-based decision support services for the protection of life and property.

The StormReady program helps community leaders and emergency managers strengthen their local safety programs by providing clear-cut guidelines on how to improve hazardous weather operations, providing opportunities for the Tollway to work in collaboration with the National Weather Service to promote public safety during extreme weather events.

“The Illinois Tollway is ready at any given moment to respond to any type of extreme weather to keep customers safe on our roadways,” said Illinois Tollway Executive Director Cassandra Rouse. “Safety is a top priority for the Tollway and we have developed comprehensive, proactive plans and procedures to anticipate, communicate and respond to hazardous weather conditions.”

The Illinois Tollway has a well-established track record of being prepared for extreme weather.

Each winter, the Tollway deploys its fleet of 196 snowplows, employs more than 200 staff and supervisors working around the clock and stockpiles tons of salt and other roadway materials to ensure its more than 1.5 million daily drivers can safely reach their destinations. The Tollway also deploys around-the-clock Zero Weather Road Patrols to quickly locate and assist customers who become stranded on the Tollway system whenever temperatures or sustained wind chills fall below zero degrees.

In the summer months, the Tollway deploys 24-hour Hot Weather Patrols whenever temperatures or heat indexes rise to hazardous extremes. And, in June 2022, Tollway staff helped respond to a very large and destructive tornado that damaged 225 homes and injured at least eight people in Naperville and Woodridge.

As part of a review process, local representatives of the National Weather Service and several emergency management agencies toured the Tollway's Traffic Operations Center and Dispatch Center and met with Tollway staff to discuss the ways in which the agency meets the qualifications to be certified StormReady. The Tollway meets the criteria through its comprehensive planning and preparation, including:

- 24/7/365 emergency Traffic Operations Center
- Robust weather notification system that includes two-way radio communications, data messaging, cellphones, emails, social media platforms, ham radio weather spotter networks and roadway signage to directly communicate with motorists and the communities served by the Tollway system
- Emergency hazardous weather operations plans to protect employees, with well-coordinated evacuation routes and shelter areas

The Illinois Tollway is one of only three toll agencies nationwide that's recognized by the National Weather Service among the nearly 3,200 StormReady sites throughout the United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Pacific Islands. In Illinois, there are more than 150 sites recognized as StormReady, including 36 counties, 90 communities, 19 universities and colleges, seven commercial and two government agencies – the Illinois Tollway and Argonne National Laboratory. StormReady certification must be renewed every four years.

About the Illinois Tollway

The Illinois Tollway is a user-fee system that receives no state or federal funds for maintenance and operations. The agency maintains and operates 294 miles of roadways in 12 counties in Northern Illinois, including the Reagan Memorial Tollway (I-88), the Veterans Memorial Tollway (I-355), the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway (I-90), the Tri-State Tollway (I-94/I-294/I-80) and the Illinois Route 390 Tollway.

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