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Oakwood installs tornado sirens

Hall will have 17 in total

Oakwood has two new tornado sirens up and running - including one near where an August 2008 tornado struck - and is preparing to put up a third one on the Chestnut Mountain side of town.

One siren is near the Hall County Fire Station No. 5 off Martin Road and Atlanta Highway and the other one is near Oakwood Elementary School.

The third one will be placed near Winder Highway and Martin Road.

"Hopefully, that will get resolved quickly," Oakwood City Manager Stan Brown said Tuesday.

He has said once the towers are installed, most of the city will be able to hear the sirens.

William Wright, Hall's Emergency Management Agency coordinator, said officials have conducted a "silent test" to make sure the installed towers are operating. An audible test will be conducted later.

The city is using a \$25,000 grant and a \$34,000 match from its budget for the project. The Georgia Emergency Management Agency/Office of Homeland Security is handling the grant.

Working with the Hall County EMA, Oakwood had "looked at existing (sirens) ... and where we really need some coverage," Brown told the Oakwood City Council in December.

Sirens now serving the Oakwood area are at West Hall High School on McEver Road, Gainesville State College on Mundy Mill Road and the DaVinci Academy on Poplar Springs Road.

"We had some holes (in coverage), particularly in downtown Oakwood," where the school is located, Brown said Tuesday. "We were beyond the radius where those (other) sirens were effective."

The city's goal was to get the sirens in place before "we got into the heart of" stormy weather that can strike in spring and summer.

Oakwood got a serious taste of bad weather on Aug. 26, 2008, when two tornadoes passed through the area, damaging four first-grade classrooms at Oakwood Elementary.

They also swept by Gainesville State College and tore most of the roof off the gym at Lyman Hall Elementary School off Memorial Park Drive near Gainesville. In all, the tornadoes caused about \$3.4 million in damage.

With the completion of the Oakwood towers, Hall County will have 17 sirens.

Wright said he sees a need for others in the area, including downtown Gainesville and the Flowery Branch area. But the sirens alone aren't enough to provide residents full protection.

They are intended mainly to alert people who are outdoors to seek cover, preferably indoors to get more information from a weather radio, Wright said.