

The United States averages more than 1,300 tornadoes per year, according to NOAA's Storm Prediction Center. In recognition of Severe Weather Awareness Week in Nebraska from March 22 to March 26, U.S. Cellular offers the following safety tips to help residents prepare for severe weather:

- When the power is out and phone lines are down, have an extra cell phone battery charged and ready. Also, keep a car charger handy. All contact numbers should be pre-programmed into your cell phone, so voice, text or e-mail messages can be sent instantly.
- If phone service is disrupted or jammed by high volume, try sending a text message from a cell phone. Text messages use shorter periods of available space on a wireless network and often work when phone service is disrupted.

People should ask an out-of-town family member or friend to serve as an emergency contact. After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance.

- Families may be separated when a weather disaster strikes, so agree beforehand how to connect with one another.

"One of the biggest obstacles in the aftermath of a storm is being able to communicate with friends and family to assure others that they are safe or to seek emergency assistance," said Lamart Clay, U.S. Cellular's director of sales in Nebraska and southwest Iowa. "U.S. Cellular has the capability for storm victims to reach out to loved ones or call for help thanks to backup generators at our cell sites and the ability to bring in mobile sites to handle higher call volumes after a storm hits."

The 9,000 associates of U.S. Cellular believe a wireless phone enhances people's lives and a wireless company should be in the business of bringing people together. Based in Chicago, U.S. Cellular is the nation's sixth-largest wireless carrier, serving 6.2 million customers across the country. To learn more about the company, visit one of its retail stores, uscellular.com or Facebook.

