

# Tornado Awareness Week: 5<sup>th</sup> graders at Sugar Creek Elementary Learn How to be Prepared for Disasters and Emergencies



## ***Nearly Two Years After Tornado Hit Verona, Students Learn What to Do if Severe Weather Strikes***

**VERONA, Tuesday, April 12, 2016** – Nearly two years after a tornado destroyed part of a Verona Area School District elementary school, nearly 75 5<sup>th</sup> graders at Sugar Creek Elementary School learned today how to be prepared to respond in the event of a disaster or emergency.

The students are participating in the STEP, or Student Tools for Emergency Planning, program for the first time. The statewide program teaches 5<sup>th</sup> graders how to be prepared for various emergencies and disasters, including tornadoes, flooding and storms. The program also shows students how to put together an emergency kit and develop an emergency plan with their families.

“As we saw two years ago, tornados can strike anywhere with little to no warning. No place is immune to disaster, even an elementary school,” said Principal Todd Brunner. “That’s why we feel it is so important to be prepared. We’re excited to bring the STEP program to Sugar Creek and give our 5<sup>th</sup> graders the tools and knowledge they need to have confidence in an emergency situation.”

At the event, the 5<sup>th</sup> graders received their own STEP emergency bags. They also heard from officials from Wisconsin Emergency Management and AT&T, State Rep. Sondy Pope, and teachers affected by the 2014 Verona tornado about actions they can take to be prepared in an emergency situation.

Country View Elementary School Principal Michelle Nummerdor also shared her experiences when her school was partially destroyed by a tornado in 2014.

“The STEP program is a great way for our fifth graders to learn about emergency preparedness and take that information home to their parents, grandparents and siblings,” said Rep. Pope. “Many families don’t have emergency plans, and STEP empowers our youth to start that conversation with their families and be a leader.”

The week of April 11-15 has been designated as Tornado & Severe Weather Awareness Week in Wisconsin, with two statewide Tornado Drills planned for April 14.

Wisconsin averages 23 tornadoes annually, according to the National Weather Service. In June 2014, a tornado hit Verona, smashing Country View Elementary School and damaging at least 150 homes.

The 2016 STEP program is supported by a \$15,000 AT&T Innovation & Investment Award. AT&T has a long-standing commitment to disaster preparedness and business continuity, and is the first company in the nation to earn U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) certification for disaster preparedness. Since 2012, AT&T has provided \$58,000 total to support the STEP program in Wisconsin.

“We know how critical it is to be ready and prepared to respond in the event of a disaster or emergency,” said Scott T. VanderSanden, president of AT&T Wisconsin. “Not only are we proud that our network operations are state-of-the-art when it comes to performing during and after a disaster, but we are also proud to help prepare Wisconsin families to respond to emergencies through our support of the STEP program.”

Teachers are provided with all STEP materials at no cost to the schools, including instructor guides, DVDs and copies of student handouts. All students participating in the program also receive an emergency kit to take home, which includes a flashlight. The basic lesson is only one hour of instruction, but teachers can expand the lessons to cover eight hours of materials.

This is the sixth year that STEP is being offered to schools in Wisconsin. Over 11,000 students from 200 schools across Wisconsin are participating in the STEP program this spring. Over 28,000 students have participated in the program over the past five years. To view the list of participating schools by county, please visit [http://Readywisconsin.wi.gov/step/step\\_2016\\_Schools.pdf](http://Readywisconsin.wi.gov/step/step_2016_Schools.pdf).

For more information on STEP, please visit <http://readywisconsin.wi.gov/step/>.

The AT&T Wisconsin Innovation & Investment Award program provides funding to local organizations and programs that improve the community by advancing education, enhancing the environment, promoting economic development, or delivering other community services.

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