Boone County officials to test new storm siren system

Monday, March 2, 2015 at 2:00 pm

Local emergency management authorities and the University of Missouri will join other jurisdictions around the state Tuesday in a test of outdoor warning sirens during National Severe Weather Preparedness Week.

Outdoor warning sirens will be activated at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, according to a Columbia/Boone County Office of Emergency Management news release. A backup test has been set for Thursday in case of bad weather on Tuesday.

The drill also will allow emergency managers to test the county’s new three-zone warning siren system, the release said. Under the new system, the county is split into northern, central and southern storm siren activation zones.

MU will test its entire system, which includes text messages, email alerts and activation of campus emergency beacons, the university said in a news release.

A mixed bag: The science of plastic microparticles

Monday, March 2, 2015 | 12:00 p.m. CST
BY CHRISTOPHER AIKEN

COLUMBIA – Plastic bags clog storm drains and litter waterways.

That wastefulness was the initial thrust of a local ordinance conceived in spring 2014 by the Osage Group of the Missouri Sierra Club, Carolyn Amparan, chair of the group's executive committee, said.

Plastic microparticles were not yet on the group’s radar, Amparan said. "Waste and sustainability were the initial drivers," she said.
It wasn't until the group watched the documentary "Bag It" last summer that members began to grasp the full potential of plastic's environmental burden, Amparan said.

Filled with garbage gyres and plastic-tangled wildlife, the film captures one man's disillusionment with synthetic waste. According to the film, plastic bags are dissolved by sunlight into microparticles – tiny plastic fragments that adsorb, or hold, harmful chemicals from the environment and taxi them into the food web.

**The film features Frederick vom Saal, an MU biologist who teamed up with the Osage Group last fall. Vom Saal specializes in the effects of plastic and plastic additives such as BPA on endocrine function and early human development.**

**Vom Saal discussed the possible environmental impact of plastic microparticles at a public forum earlier this month.**

The polyethylene used in grocery bags is the most photo-degradable plastic out there, he said, and its microparticles adsorb chemical pollutants such as DDT and polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, both of which are banned in the U.S. but persist in the environment.

A 2013 article published in the journal Nature reported that: "Pesticides and organic pollutants such as PCBs are consistently found on plastic waste at harmful concentrations 100 times those found in sediments and 1 million times those occurring in sea water."

The Environmental Protection Agency lists both PCBs and DDT as potential human carcinogens with a range of damaging effects on reproductive, immune, nervous and endocrine systems in both animals and humans.

There is emerging evidence that microparticles deliver these toxic pollutants into the food chain when contaminant-bound particles are ingested by animals. Pollutants such as PCBs are lipophilic, or "fat-loving." Rather than being metabolized they get embedded in the fat-tissues of organisms and accumulate over time. Stored chemical
concentrations get amplified up through the food web in a process called "biomagnification," vom Saal said.

For example, laboratory studies found a positive correlation between plastic ingestion and tissue concentration of PCBs in seabirds. Scientists can measure chemical tissue concentrations using oil from the bird's preen gland making it a good candidate for noninvasive research. Studies show that other species, including plankton, nematodes, shrimp, lobster and fish, also eat microparticles.

Laboratory evidence – and there's plenty of it – is suggestive, but it leaves several big picture questions unanswered. To what extent does plastic contribute to or enhance an organism's overall environmental exposure to contaminants such as PCBs? What do effects look like on a population level? And finally, do microparticles pose a significant risk to human health?


Donald Tillitt, environmental toxicologist at the USGS Columbia Environmental Research Center, said that while microparticle research is relatively new, certain aspects of it are less speculative than others.

There's no doubt, for instance, that microplastic in the environment is increasing, Tillitt said. "But whether they are causing untoward effects – that's a much more complex question."

Tillitt said that he's also split on how to use the microparticle science politically:

On one hand, he doesn't think it's the strongest argument for the plastic bag ordinance — there are too many unanswered questions. On the other hand, he doesn't want to underplay its potential importance. That would be the "innocent until proven guilty" mentality, he said. "In terms of its application to science, that principle is not so great."

In 2012, the EPA estimated that only 12 percent of the plastic bags produced that year were recycled.

Wastefulness and littering are still the main drivers of the ordinance, Amparan said, but that doesn't mean microparticles shouldn't be part of the conversation.
5 things you don’t need to know but might want to and where can you find Missouri's best burger?

What's the best burger in Missouri? According to a new ranking of the best burgers in every state by Thrillist, it is the patty melt at the Westport Flea Market Bar and Grill in Kansas City, although the burger at Five Bistro in St. Louis also got a shout-out. In Illinois, the best is the single cheeseburger with an egg at Au Cheval in Chicago.

A new study by researchers at the University of Missouri Columbia has found that heavy Facebook use can lead to envy and serious depression. Mizzou researchers teamed up with Nanyang Technological University and Bradley University to survey 736 college students for the study.

Anna Harris has been elected president of the International Photography Hall of Fame. Harris, 75, played a role in making St. Louis the home of the Hall of Fame in 2012.

In conjunction with Forbes annual ranking of the world's richest billionaires, the magazine has also put together a list of the World's Most Eligible Billionaires, which includes St. Louis native and Twitter cofounder Jack Dorsey.

Check out this Wall Street Journal piece about the annual Sand Mine Challenge in Crystal City, Missouri — a race in which runners slog through sand, water and mud in a cave that is 150 feet underground.

SEC's Slive leery of making freshman athletes ineligible

By RALPH D. RUSSO

NO MU MENTION
Southeastern Conference Commissioner Mike Slive says it would be best to wait until after the NCAA's new initial eligibility standards take effect in 2016 before considering whether to keep freshmen off the field.

Slive said in a statement to The Associated Press on Monday that if the goal is to improve graduation rates and grade-point averages, "we have to remember that each college student has his or her own academic challenges."

"To put a blanket over these student-athletes with a year on the bench doesn't address those individual needs to incentivize academic progress. Many students do come to college prepared both academically and athletically ready to compete in the classroom and in competition, and to penalize those students with a universal policy may create unintended consequences not beneficial to many student-athletes," he said.

Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany has said he wants his conference to consider making freshmen ineligible in football and men's basketball, and Pac-12 Commissioner Larry Scott and Bob Bowlsby have both expressed support for at least examining the possibility.

However, Delany has stressed the Big Ten could not act alone on a "year of readiness" for freshmen football and basketball players because it would put the conference at a competitive disadvantage.

Slive's statement made it clear the SEC has no interest in diving into the freshmen eligibility question for at least a couple of years.

The NCAA initial eligibility standards go up starting with the freshman class of 2016. To be immediately eligible for competition, prospective student-athletes must have at least a 2.3 GPA, with a sliding scale tied to SAT scores. An SAT score of 1,000 requires a 2.5 high school core-course GPA for competition and a 2.0 high school core-course GPA for aid and practice.

Prospects also must successfully complete 10 of the 16 total required core courses before the start of their senior year in high school.

"A lot of thought and preparation went into the new initial eligibility rules that go into effect in 2016. It is more appropriate to implement these new regulations and understand their impact before applying additional eligibility restrictions that may be more cosmetic than effective," Slive said.

Most college sports leaders have spoken out against the NBA's rule requiring American players to be 19 years old and a year out of high school to be drafted. The rule has created the so-called one-and-done player in college basketball.

"If this proposal is about student-athletes turning professional, we need to be careful not to create rules for a few that penalize the many," Slive said. "The universe of student-athletes who leave early for professional sports is very small compared to the numbers that participate in football and men's basketball. And just because a student-athlete enters professional sports does not mean he or she has totally abandoned their academic pursuits."
Letter to the Editor: Paying students' tuition is one of the best investments we can make

I strongly agree with Clint Zweifel’s commentary "A new promise to Missouri families" (Feb. 25), in which he proposed a plan to pay tuition and fees for Missouri students with qualifying grades and service records to attend Missouri colleges. His plan, Missouri Promise, is one of the best investments we as Missourians can make in the futures of some of our most promising students.

I was the beneficiary of such a program in New York City where I was raised. Both my wife and I received free tuition at what is now The City University of New York. Our qualifications were similar to what Mr. Zweifel has proposed. Over the years New York City has benefited by the increased taxes CUNY graduates paid as well as by the contributions graduates made to the life of the city and the nation. Some of its better-known alumni are Colin Powell, Jonas Salk, Bernard Baruch, Henry Kissinger, Ira Gershwin and Felix Frankfurter.

In years to come, wouldn’t it be wonderful if Missouri could boast of its list of renowned graduates who were able to attend college because our citizens of today had the foresight to support free tuition and fees for our brightest students of today?

Rev. Dr. James B. Barnes Sr.  •  St. Charles

St. Louis Graduates, Regional Chamber consolidate efforts to help St. Louisans graduate from college

By CAMILLE PHILLIPS  •  FEB 28, 2015

St. Louis has been selected by a national education organization for aid increasing the number of adults with college degrees in the region.
The Lumina Foundation wants 60 percent of Americans to have postsecondary degrees by 2025. The foundation is partnering with St. Louis Graduates and the St. Louis Regional Chamber of Commerce to further their existing efforts towards that goal.

To that end, Lumina is giving St. Louis training, advice and $120,000.

St. Louis Graduates’ new co-chairs, Allison Williams and Alan Byrd, will be working with Anne Klein of the St. Louis Regional Chamber on the new collaboration. Klein was hired by the chamber three months ago to spearhead their educational efforts.

“The business community sees that if we are to grow and attract new talent, attract new businesses having those bachelor degrees and that educated workforce is essential,” Klein explained, adding that the biggest impact the chamber can have on postsecondary education is to shine a spotlight on its importance to the region.

According to Williams the new partnerships with Lumina and the regional chamber will further St. Louis Graduates’ existing efforts to build community networks.

“It really is a stay the path,” Williams said. “Think of it as we were at 1.0 and now we’re working to get to 2.0.”

Williams and Byrd will become co-chairs of St. Louis Graduates in April. Williams is in charge of programing at the Wyman Center, which focuses on teen outreach. Byrd is dean of enrollment at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

According to Byrd, advocating for more need-based financial aid will be one way the nonprofit coalition continues its mission.

“We definitely want to see a shift in state aid to focus more on need-based aid. And then also working with the colleges and universities to have more balance in how they spend their institutional funds in between merit and need,” Byrd said.

Another priority, said Williams, will be improving K-12 education so that students are better prepared for college.

Budget standoff leaves California college hopefuls in limbo

By LISA LEFF

NO MU MENTION
SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — University of California admissions officers are sifting through a record number of applications, but they have no idea how many new students they can enroll.

The uncertainty stems from the very public clash between university President Janet Napolitano and Gov. Jerry Brown over the state's role in underwriting the cost of a UC education for qualified Californians. Arguing that Sacramento has failed to fulfill its fiscal obligations, Napolitano plans to raise tuition 5 percent this fall and expand undergraduate enrollment by 3,000 — one-third of the slots for Californians and two-thirds for students from abroad and out-of-state. The governor, for his part, is threatening to withhold about $120 million in state funds unless the university keeps both its tuition rates and non-resident enrollment flat.

Their competing visions — along with additional plans by top lawmakers — have thrown off the tenuous mechanics of the admissions cycle. Campus officials still are waiting to find out what their overall enrollments are expected to be, a figure they use to calculate how many new students they can accept and then what proportion will be state residents subsidized by taxpayers, system spokeswoman Dianne Klein said.

"Campuses are in a really tough position. We don't have a state budget, so we don't know what the state will provide to the university, and at the same time we have a responsibility to reply to applicants," Klein said. "How is that going to translate? Is it going to be admitting fewer students? Is it going to be putting more students on the wait list ... ? It will not be admitting more students than we reasonably know we have funding for."

The rapidly growing nonresident enrollment is a flashpoint in budget negotiations. Between 2008 and this year, in response to recession-induced budget cuts and what the university says has been insufficient funding to support more in-state students, the share of nonresident undergraduates more than doubled system-wide while in-state enrollment grew by about 1 percent.

"That is a disparity that every California taxpayer is concerned about, that triple-digit difference," Assemblywoman Catharine Baker, a newly elected Republican from Dublin, California, and mother of twins, told the university's chief financial officer during a recent hearing.

At Berkeley and Los Angeles, students from other states and countries make up about one in five undergraduates. They account for one in seven at UC San Diego and nearly one in 10 at the Davis, Irvine and Santa Barbara campuses.

Officials insist they would happily serve more students from California if the state gave them more money, and they point out that UCLA and UC Berkeley have far fewer non-resident students than public colleges such as University of Michigan and University of Virginia. They also say the $640 million in nonresident tuition campuses have generated this year has allowed them to offer more classes and maintain programs benefiting all students. Nonresidents pay $22,878 on top of the $12,192 in tuition and fees for residents.
"It has become an important part of how we meet our budgets," UC Provost Aimee Dorr told the university's governing board last month.

The assurances have done little to persuade residents that their children are not being frozen out of an affordable, quality education close to home — a belief that has students heading out of California for colleges that are easier to get into and less crowded, said Peggy Hock, president of the Western Association for College Admission Counseling.

Hock, who works at a private school near Stanford University, also worries that smaller UC campuses, which enroll the highest percentages of black and Latino undergraduates but currently attract fewer non-residents, are getting short-changed because individual schools get to keep the supplemental tuition paid by their international and out-of-state students.

"We are creating a system of haves and have-nots and exacerbating the perceived pecking order," she said.

Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de Leon and Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins, both Democrats like Brown and Napolitano, have proposed raising the tuition surcharge on non-residents by $4,000 and $5,000 respectively next year to stave off tuition increases for Californians and increase the seats available for them.

Fabienne Roth, a UCLA junior from Switzerland who is active in student government, said students like her have become a convenient target.

"I've definitely been told, 'Why are you studying here? Go home,' " Roth said. "They are putting non-residents against residents, and what is frustrating is it doesn't fundamentally solve the issue of funding UC. It's just an easy way out."