

## Lifesaving warnings by phone

Lynsay Clutter/Eyewitness News

February 13 - A warning siren has traditionally been the way to inform people that threatening conditions are imminent.

But people can't always hear the sirens. Now there is a new way to warn residents. It's called Reverse 911.

Carmel is one of the dispatch centers with Reverse 911 technology in place. It was originally used to alert people of missing children and environmental hazards. Some state leaders are pushing a bill, believing the warning system could be used for more types of emergencies. Now more counties should be able to get it.

Thunderstorms, snowstorms, and tornados can hit in an instant. That's why state lawmakers are pushing a new bill that could save lives. If passed, it would allow counties to use emergency telephone fees to set up Reverse 911.

Most of us are familiar with emergency 911, a number that connects you to first responders in time of emergency.

Linda Acosta, assistant supervisor with the Carmel system, says with Reverse 911 dispatchers call you. "Especially if you had a hazardous material situation and you don't want people coming out and getting exposed to something like that. If you have kids wander off from anywhere."

Dispatchers type up the warning, record it on a phone line and dial 3,000 homes at a time. Acosta says they can also choose a specific area. "If you just want a neighborhood as opposed to half the county."

Dozens of people slept through sirens that warned of an F3 tornado last



Reverse 911 could supplement sirens in severe weather.



Many victims of the Evansville tornado were asleep when the storm hit.

November in Evansville.

Acosta says the system doesn't stop with just one call. "A phone call seems to get the attention more quickly and if they don't answer the first time, it's set up to be programmed to call a second time."

Carmel still has warning sirens. But Acosta says they're glad they also have Reverse 911. "If you could just save one person, it's worth having the machine in your center. Just one life makes the difference."

Residents can always choose to opt out of the system. The Indiana Senate has already passed the bill unanimously. A House committee could vote on it this week, sending it to the full House.