BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Weather Apps & Emergency Alerts

Radar, phone alerts, weather radios and power outages — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for every household in storm country

Set it up on a calm, sunny day

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For iPhone (iOS 26), Pixel & Samsung (Android 16, One UI 8) and NOAA Weather Radio · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to knowing what the weather is about to do and getting warned in time. Start with the one-afternoon plan in Part 1, then turn to the part you need: phone alerts, weather apps and radar, a NOAA Weather Radio, or getting ready for a power outage. Read in any order and at your own pace. If a screen looks a little different on your phone, the idea is still the same.

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PART 1

Getting Ready

Why one warning isn't enough, what the weather words really mean, and a calm afternoon plan to set everything up before the next storm.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. Here in Northeast Ohio we get a little of everything: summer thunderstorms, the occasional tornado warning, lake-effect snow, ice, and wind that knocks the power out at the worst possible time. The good news is that you have more ways than ever to see bad weather coming, and most of them are already in your pocket or on your kitchen counter.

I'm Bill. For more than 30 years I've helped people make sense of their technology, and I serve folks right here in Portage County, Ohio. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it at your kitchen table: slowly, in plain English, one step at a time.

Who this guide is for

- Anyone with an iPhone or an Android phone (Google Pixel, Samsung Galaxy and others) who wants to be sure the emergency alerts are working.
- Anyone who'd like to read a radar map and know whether to bring the lawn chairs in.
- Anyone thinking about a NOAA Weather Radio, the kind that wakes you up at night for a tornado warning.
- Grown children and caregivers who want to help a parent get set up, with that parent's blessing.
- Anyone who wants a simple plan for the next long power outage.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this guide does for you

By the end you'll know which alerts your phone gets and how to make sure they're on, how to read a radar map, how to program a weather radio for Portage County, what to do the moment a tornado warning sounds, how to keep your phone alive through an outage, and how to spot the scammers who show up after a storm.

The big promise: you can't break it

Nothing in this guide can harm your phone. Every setting can be switched back. The one thing I'll be careful about is **turning warnings off**. That's the only setting in this whole topic that can really matter, so when we get there, I'll explain exactly what you'd be giving up.

STAY SAFE

A phone is one warning, not the only warning

Phones die, cell towers go down, and phones on silent sometimes sleep through things. That's why this guide teaches more than one way to be warned. See Chapter 3, *Four Ways Warnings Reach You* for the whole picture.

You're never stuck alone

If anything here feels like too much, call or text me at **(330) 200-8042**. We'll sort it out together, with no judgment. There's no such thing as a silly question when it comes to staying safe.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

Your Storm-Ready Plan in One Afternoon

You don't need to read this whole guide before you start. If you have one quiet afternoon, do these things in this order. Each one points to the chapter with the slow, step-by-step directions.

1. **Make sure emergency alerts are on** on every phone in the house. iPhone: Chapter 6, *Emergency Alerts on iPhone*. Pixel: Chapter 7, *Emergency Alerts on Google Pixel*. Samsung: Chapter 8, *Emergency Alerts on Samsung Galaxy*.
2. **Learn the difference between a watch and a warning.** It takes two minutes. See Chapter 4, *Watch, Warning, Advisory: What the Words Mean*.
3. **Turn on severe weather notifications in your weather app** so you get a heads-up even without a government alert. See Chapter 14, *Rain and Severe Weather Notifications on iPhone* or Chapter 16, *Weather on Google Pixel and Other Android Phones*.
4. **Get the Portage County EMA app** for local alerts. See Chapter 11, *Portage County Alerts and the EMA App*.
5. **Consider a NOAA Weather Radio** for your bedroom, set up for Portage County. See Chapter 18, *What a NOAA Weather Radio Does* and Chapter 20, *Programming Your Radio for Portage County*.
6. **Pick your safe spot** for a tornado warning, and tell everyone in the house. See Chapter 22, *When a Tornado Warning Hits*.
7. **Charge a power bank** and put a flashlight where you can find it in the dark. See Chapter 24, *Getting Ready for a Power Outage*.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why do it now, on a calm day

When the sky turns green and the phones start blaring, nobody wants to be hunting through settings. A calm afternoon of setup now means that on the bad day, you only have one job: get to your safe spot.

What to have handy before you start

- Your phone, charged, and the passcode if you've forgotten it.
- Your Apple Account or Google Account password, in case you install an app.
- The weather radio's instruction booklet, if you have one.

- About an hour, and a cup of coffee.

TIP

Do it together

If you share a home, set up both phones side by side. One person reads the steps, the other taps. It goes faster, and you'll both know where the settings live.

CHAPTER 3

Four Ways Warnings Reach You

Emergency managers like to talk about **layers** of warning. The idea is simple: no single warning works every time, so you want two or three that don't depend on each other. If one fails, another one gets through.

Warning	What it's good for
Phone emergency alerts	Loud government alerts that arrive on their own, with no app needed. Works as long as your phone is on and connected to a cell network. See Chapter 5, *Wireless Emergency Alerts Explained*.
Weather apps	Forecasts, radar maps and optional notifications. Great for planning, and many can send severe weather notices. Needs an internet connection. See Chapter 12, *Choosing a Weather App*.
NOAA Weather Radio	A small radio that stays quiet until the National Weather Service sends a warning for your county, then sounds an alarm. Works with batteries when the power is out. See Chapter 18, *What a NOAA Weather Radio Does*.
Outdoor sirens	Meant for people who are outside. Not designed to wake you indoors. See Chapter 21, *Outdoor Sirens: What They Are and Aren't*.

A good combination for most homes

- Phone emergency alerts turned on, for everyone in the house.
- A weather app with severe weather notifications turned on.
- A NOAA Weather Radio by the bed, with fresh backup batteries.
- TV or radio news for the details once you know something is happening.

GOOD TO KNOW

Nights are the hard part

Most of us are well warned during the day. The tricky time is overnight, when phones are on the charger in the kitchen and the TV is off. A weather radio in the bedroom is the classic answer to that gap.

HEADS UP

Wi-Fi calling isn't the same as cell service

Phone emergency alerts come over the cell network. A phone in airplane mode or one that only has Wi-Fi may not get them. See Chapter 9, *Not Getting Alerts? Fixes to Try*.

CHAPTER 4

Watch, Warning, Advisory: What the Words Mean

The National Weather Service uses three words over and over. Once you know them, every alert, app and newscast makes more sense. The short version: **a watch means get ready; a warning means act now**.

Word	What it means	What you do
Watch	Conditions are right for the danger to develop. It's *possible*.	Keep your phone charged and nearby. Review where you'd go. Keep an eye on updates.
Warning	The danger is *happening or about to happen* near you.	Act now. For a tornado warning, go to your safe spot immediately.
Advisory	Something less serious, but still a nuisance or a hazard, like slick roads or dense fog.	Take care, slow down, and plan around it.

Who issues what

Tornado and severe thunderstorm **watches** come from the Storm Prediction Center and usually cover a big area for several hours. **Warnings** come from your local National Weather Service office and cover a much smaller area for a shorter time. For Portage County, that local office is **NWS Cleveland**.

HEADS UP

A warning can come without a watch

Sometimes a storm spins up quickly and a tornado warning is issued with no watch beforehand. Never wait for a watch before taking a warning seriously.

TIP

Same words for winter

The same idea works for snow and ice. A winter storm **watch** means it may be coming; a **warning** means it's on the way and will be serious. See Chapter 23, *Ohio Winter Weather*.

GOOD TO KNOW

Words may be changing a little

The National Weather Service has been working on simpler, impact-based wording for some alerts. If you see an unfamiliar name, the watch-means-ready, warning-means-act rule still holds.

PART 2

Emergency Alerts on Your Phone

The loud alerts that arrive on their own: what they are, how to make sure they're on, and what to do when one doesn't come through.

CHAPTER 5

Wireless Emergency Alerts Explained

Wireless Emergency Alerts, often shortened to **WEA**, are the short, loud messages that make every phone in the room buzz and honk at once. They're sent by authorized government officials through your cell company. You don't sign up, you don't install anything, and they're free.

What makes them special is that they're sent to **phones in an area**, not to a list of phone numbers. If you're visiting family in another state when a tornado warning is issued there, your phone gets that area's alert.

The four kinds of alerts

Kind of alert	What it's for
National Alerts	From the President or FEMA during a national emergency. These can't be turned off. (They used to be called Presidential Alerts.)
Imminent Threat Alerts	Severe weather and other immediate dangers to life or safety, such as a tornado warning or a flash flood warning.
AMBER Alerts	Urgent bulletins about a child abduction, so the public can help.
Public Safety Messages	Important advice, such as a boil-water notice or a shelter location.

GOOD TO KNOW

Test alerts are off unless you turn them on

State and local test alerts don't arrive unless you choose to receive them. If you'd like to see what an alert looks like, some phones have a test alerts switch; most people leave it off.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters for you

A WEA tornado warning can reach you in the grocery store, in the car, or visiting friends across the county, without any app. It's the single most important weather setting on your phone, and it's almost always on already. The next chapters show you how to check.

TIP

Coming soon: maps in alerts

The FCC has told cell companies to add maps to alerts so you can see whether you're inside the warned area. The deadline it set is December 2026, so you may start seeing these soon.

CHAPTER 6

Emergency Alerts on iPhone

On an iPhone, emergency alerts are called **Government Alerts**, and they live at the very bottom of the Notifications settings. They're on by default, but it only takes a minute to check.

To check your alerts

1. Open the **Settings** app (the gray gear).
2. Tap **Notifications**.
3. Scroll all the way to the bottom to the section called **Government Alerts**.
4. Make sure **Emergency Alerts** is turned on (the switch is green).
5. Make sure **Public Safety Alerts** and **AMBER Alerts** are on too, unless you have a strong reason to turn one off (see Chapter 10, *Should I Turn Any Alerts Off?*).

Always Play Sound

Tap **Emergency Alerts** to see one more switch, **Always Play Sound**. With it on, an emergency alert makes noise even when your iPhone is set to silent with the switch or button on its side. For most people, and especially anyone who silences the phone at night, I recommend leaving it on.

GOOD TO KNOW

Your Apple Watch follows along

When an alert type is on for your iPhone, Apple turns it on for a paired Apple Watch too, so you may feel the alert on your wrist.

HEADS UP

Needs a SIM and a supported carrier

Government alerts arrive over the cell network, so the iPhone needs a working SIM or eSIM from a cell company. An old iPhone used only on Wi-Fi won't get them.

TIP

Don't see Government Alerts?

Make sure you scrolled all the way down. The section sits below every app in the list. If it still isn't there, see Chapter 9, *Not Getting Alerts? Fixes to Try*.

CHAPTER 7

Emergency Alerts on Google Pixel

On a Google Pixel, emergency alerts are called **Wireless emergency alerts**. Google lets you choose which kinds you get. The two weather-related ones are **Extreme threats** and **Severe threats**.

To check your alerts

1. Open the **Settings** app.
2. Tap **Notifications**.
3. Tap **Wireless emergency alerts**.
4. Make sure **Extreme threats** and **Severe threats** are turned on.
5. Leave the other alert types, such as **AMBER alerts**, on as well, unless you have a strong reason not to.

GOOD TO KNOW

Some alerts can't be switched off

In the United States, national alerts (presidential alerts) can't be turned off. That's by design.

Other Android phones

Android phones from Motorola, OnePlus and others put this setting in slightly different places. The quickest way to find it: open **Settings**, tap the search bar at the top, and type **emergency alerts**. Tap the result that says **Wireless emergency alerts**.

TIP

Search is your friend

Menus move around from one Android phone to the next, but the search bar at the top of Settings finds almost anything. When a step in this guide doesn't match your phone, search for the setting's name.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why check even though it's on by default

Phones sometimes get handed down, reset or set up by someone else, and a switch gets turned off along the way. One minute of checking means you're not finding out during a storm.

CHAPTER 8

Emergency Alerts on Samsung Galaxy

Samsung keeps emergency alerts in its own **Safety and emergency** section of Settings. Samsung also keeps a handy history of past alerts, so you can reread an alert you dismissed too quickly.

To check your alerts

1. Open the **Settings** app.
2. Tap **Safety and emergency**.
3. Tap **Wireless emergency alerts**.
4. Make sure the alert types are on: **Extreme threats**, **Severe threats** and **AMBER alerts**.
5. Look further down for alert preferences such as **vibration**, **alert reminders** and having the phone **speak the alert message** out loud.

To reread an old alert

1. Go to **Settings > Safety and emergency > Wireless emergency alerts**.
2. Tap **Emergency alert history**.
3. Tap any alert to read the whole message again.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Spoken alerts help tired eyes

Having the phone read the alert out loud is a real help if your reading glasses are on the nightstand, or if your vision isn't what it used to be.

GOOD TO KNOW

Your carrier can change the menu

On some Samsung phones the wording differs a little depending on the cell company. If you don't see the option, search Settings for **emergency alerts**.

CHAPTER 9

Not Getting Alerts? Fixes to Try

Sometimes a neighbor's phone goes off and yours stays quiet. That can be normal: alerts are aimed at an area, and the edge of the area can fall between two houses. But if it keeps happening, work through this list.

1. **Check the switches** in Chapter 6, *Emergency Alerts on iPhone*, Chapter 7, *Emergency Alerts on Google Pixel* or Chapter 8, *Emergency Alerts on Samsung Galaxy*.
2. **Turn off airplane mode.** A phone in airplane mode isn't connected to the cell network and won't get alerts.
3. **Make sure you have a cell signal,** not just Wi-Fi. Phones that only use Wi-Fi don't receive alerts.
4. **Update your phone's software.** iPhone: **Settings > General > Software Update**. Android: search Settings for **software update**.
5. **Restart the phone.** Turn it off, wait thirty seconds, turn it back on.
6. **Ask your cell company** whether your phone and plan support emergency alerts. Some very old phones don't.

HEADS UP

Prepaid and budget phones

Most phones sold today support alerts, but a very old flip phone or a phone brought over from another country may not. The FCC keeps a consumer guide on alert-capable phones, and your carrier can tell you for sure.

TIP

A backup that doesn't need cell service

If your house sits in a cell-signal dead spot, that's a strong reason for a NOAA Weather Radio. It listens to a radio transmitter, not a cell tower. See Chapter 18, *What a NOAA Weather Radio Does*.

STAY SAFE

Never call 911 to ask about an alert

If you get an alert and want details, turn on local TV or radio, or check your weather app. Keep 911 free for real emergencies.

CHAPTER 10

Should I Turn Any Alerts Off?

Alerts can be startling, especially in the middle of the night, and it's tempting to switch them off. Before you do, here's an honest look at what each switch does.

Alert	Can you turn it off?	My advice
National Alerts	No	Nothing to decide.
Imminent Threat (Extreme, Severe)	Yes	Leave on. This is your tornado and flash-flood warning.
AMBER Alerts	Yes	Your choice. They can help bring a child home.
Public Safety Messages	Yes	Leave on. Boil-water and shelter news comes this way.
Test alerts	Off unless you turn them on	Fine to leave off.

STAY SAFE

The FCC recommends keeping them on

The FCC advises against opting out of alerts. If an alert ever wakes you for a tornado warning, that's the alert doing exactly what it should.

If the noise is the problem

- Turning off **AMBER Alerts** alone cuts down nighttime alerts for some people while keeping weather warnings on.
- On iPhone, **Always Play Sound** can be turned off, but then alerts stay quiet when the phone is on silent. I'd only do that if you have a weather radio in the bedroom.
- If you turned something off and want it back, go to the same screen and switch it on again. Nothing is lost.

TIP

Turned them off by accident?

It happens, especially when an alert wakes you and you tap the first button you see. Go back to Chapter 6, *Emergency Alerts on iPhone*, Chapter 7, *Emergency Alerts on Google Pixel* or Chapter 8, *Emergency Alerts on Samsung Galaxy* and turn them back on.

CHAPTER 11

Portage County Alerts and the EMA App

Besides the alerts every phone gets, Portage County has its own emergency management office: the **Portage County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management**, often just called the **EMA**. It's the office that coordinates warnings and emergency response for the county.

How the county sends alerts

The county uses an online system called **WENS**, the Wireless Emergency Notification System. WENS is connected to FEMA's national warning system, which is the same system behind the phone alerts in Chapter 5, *Wireless Emergency Alerts Explained*, emergency broadcasts on TV and radio, and NOAA Weather Radio. During a tornado warning, participating communities in the county sound their outdoor sirens (see Chapter 21, *Outdoor Sirens: What They Are and Aren't*).

The Portage County EMA app

The county offers a free app called **Portage County EMA** for iPhone and Android. It provides preparedness information and warnings from Portage County.

1. Open the **App Store** (iPhone) or **Google Play Store** (Android).
2. Tap the search box and type **Portage County EMA**.
3. Look closely at the results. Choose the one for **Portage County, Ohio**. There's also a Portage County in Wisconsin.
4. Tap **Get** or **Install**. It's free.
5. Open the app and allow notifications when it asks, so warnings can reach you.

HEADS UP

Your town may have its own alerts too

The county says many cities and townships run their own notification systems that you sign up for separately. To find out about yours, call your local police or fire department's non-emergency number.

GOOD TO KNOW

One more free app worth knowing

FEMA's free app, called simply **FEMA**, can send National Weather Service alerts for up to five places, handy if family lives out of town. Search for **FEMA** in your app store and check that the maker is FEMA.

PART 3

Weather Apps and Radar

The forecast in your pocket: the weather app you already have, rain and storm notifications, and how to read a radar map without a meteorology degree.

CHAPTER 12

Choosing a Weather App

You probably don't need to download anything. Every iPhone comes with Apple's **Weather** app, Google Pixel phones come with **Pixel Weather**, and Samsung Galaxy phones come with Samsung's own weather app. All of them show the forecast and a radar map.

When another app makes sense

Option	What you get
The app on your phone	Free, no ads, already installed. Good forecasts and radar. Start here.
A local TV station's app	Free with ads. Forecasts from local meteorologists who know Northeast Ohio, and often live video coverage when severe storms hit.
The Weather Channel app	Free with ads; optional paid upgrades remove ads or add features. Detailed radar and video.
weather.gov	The National Weather Service website. Free, no ads, the official forecast and warnings. Works in any web browser.

TIP

One or two is plenty

Pick the built-in app plus, if you like, one local TV station's app for the human touch during big storms. Five weather apps on one phone mostly means five sets of notifications.

HEADS UP

Check before you pay

Some weather apps push a monthly subscription. You never need to pay to get warnings. Government alerts and the built-in apps are free. If an app wants money, look at the price in the app store and decide calmly.

SCAM ALERT

Only from the official app store

Get weather apps only from the **App Store** or **Google Play Store**, never from a link in a text, an email or a pop-up. See Chapter 28, *Fake Weather Apps and Alert Scams*.

CHAPTER 13

The iPhone Weather App

Apple's **Weather** app, the one with the sun and cloud on a blue icon, is a good, honest forecast with no ads. Here's a tour of what you'll see when you open it.

- **At the top:** the current temperature, conditions, and today's high and low.
- **Hourly forecast:** swipe left on the strip of hours to look ahead.
- **10-day forecast:** scroll down for the week ahead.
- **Tiles further down:** things like air quality, UV index, wind, feels-like temperature, sunrise and sunset. Tap any tile for more detail.
- **Map:** a small map you can tap to open the full radar. See Chapter 15, *Reading a Radar Map*.

To see your list of places

1. Open **Weather**.
2. Tap the **Location List** button (it looks like a small bulleted list) at the bottom right.
3. Tap any place in the list to see its forecast.
4. To add a place, type a city or ZIP code in the search box at the top, tap the result, then tap **Add**.

TIP

Let it know where you are

For the forecast and alerts to follow you, the Weather app needs Location Services. If it asks, choose **Allow While Using App** at a minimum. Severe weather notifications for your current location need more; see Chapter 14, *Rain and Severe Weather Notifications on iPhone*.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What it does for you

A quick look in the morning tells you whether to grab a coat, move the doctor's appointment, or skip the drive to Akron until the snow stops. That's the everyday value, long before anything severe.

CHAPTER 14

Rain and Severe Weather Notifications on iPhone

The iPhone Weather app can tap you on the shoulder in two helpful ways: **Severe Weather** notifications, and **Next-Hour Precipitation** notifications that tell you rain or snow is about to start or stop. Sources disagree about which of these start out on, so it's worth checking.

To turn them on

1. Open **Weather**.
2. Tap the **Location List** button at the bottom right.
3. Tap the **More** button (three dots in a circle) at the top right.
4. Tap **Notifications**. If asked, allow notifications.
5. Under your current location, turn on **Severe Weather** and **Next-Hour Precipitation**.
6. Under **Your Locations**, turn them on for any other place you care about, such as a son's or daughter's town.
7. Tap **Done**.

HEADS UP

If the switch is grayed out

Notifications for your current location need Location Services turned on for Weather. Go to **Settings > Privacy & Security > Location Services > Weather** and choose **Always**, so the app can check your location even when it isn't open.

GOOD TO KNOW

Not everywhere

Apple says next-hour precipitation notifications work in the United States, the United Kingdom and Ireland. Some features aren't available in every country.

GOOD TO KNOW

These are extras, not the official alarm

Weather app notifications are helpful, but they're not the same as the government alerts in Chapter 6, *Emergency Alerts on iPhone*. Keep those on too.

CHAPTER 15

Reading a Radar Map

A radar map shows where rain, snow or storms are falling right now and where they're heading. Once you get the hang of it, you'll know whether the storm on the news is aimed at Ravenna or passing north of you.

To open the radar on iPhone

1. Open **Weather** and pick a location.
2. Tap the small map, or tap **Show Map**.
3. Tap the **Overlay Menu** button at the upper right to switch between **Precipitation**, **Temperature**, **Air Quality** and **Wind**.
4. On the precipitation map, press the play button on the timeline near the bottom to watch the storm move.
5. Switch between the **12-hour** forecast and the **next-hour** forecast to see what's coming soon.

What the colors mean

Color	Usually means
Green	Light rain
Yellow	Moderate rain
Orange and red	Heavy rain, often thunderstorms
Purple or pink	Very heavy storms, possibly hail; in winter, pink can mean a mix of ice and snow
Blue or white	Snow (on many maps)

TIP

Watch the motion, not just the colors

Play the timeline two or three times. Storms in our area usually travel from west or southwest toward the east or northeast. If the red blob is moving toward you, plan to be indoors when it arrives.

GOOD TO KNOW

Each app uses slightly different colors

There's no single standard. Most apps show a color key on the map; tap it if you're unsure.

STAY SAFE

Radar doesn't replace a warning

A radar map shows rain and storms. It does not tell you whether a tornado is on the ground. Always act on an official warning; see Chapter 22, *When a Tornado Warning Hits*.

CHAPTER 16

Weather on Google Pixel and Other Android Phones

Google Pixel phones have their own app called **Pixel Weather**. It shows today's conditions, hourly and 10-day forecasts, and a radar map, and it can send notifications such as rain on the way.

To open Pixel Weather

1. Swipe up from the bottom of the home screen to see all your apps.
2. Tap **Weather**.
3. Scroll down for the hourly and 10-day forecast, and tap the map for radar.

To manage its notifications

1. Open **Settings**.
2. Tap **Apps**, then find and tap **Pixel Weather** (you may need to tap **See all apps**).
3. Tap **Notifications**.
4. To get notifications such as precipitation, turn on **all Pixel Weather notifications**.

> GOOD TO KNOW
>
> **Government warnings come separately**
>
> Google says government-issued severe weather warnings come through **Wireless emergency alerts**, not the Pixel Weather app. Keep both on. See Chapter 7, *Emergency Alerts on Google Pixel*.

Samsung Galaxy and other Android phones

Samsung Galaxy phones come with Samsung's own weather app and a weather widget on the home screen. Other Android phones usually have a weather widget too. To look for notification options, open the weather app, tap its menu or settings, and look for **Notifications**.

TIP

Ask Google

On any Android phone, saying **"Hey Google, what's the weather?"** or typing **weather** in the Google search bar gives you a quick forecast.

CHAPTER 17

Local TV Apps, The Weather Channel and weather.gov

Beyond the built-in app, three other sources are worth knowing. I don't recommend one company over another; each has its strengths.

Local TV station apps

The Cleveland and Akron-area TV stations each have free weather apps with forecasts from their own meteorologists. The big advantage is local knowledge, and during severe weather many stream their live coverage in the app. Expect ads.

The Weather Channel app

A free app with ads, radar, forecasts and video. It offers optional paid upgrades to remove ads or add extra features. Prices vary and change, so check the current price in your app store before subscribing, and remember you don't need to pay to be warned.

weather.gov from the National Weather Service

1. Open your web browser (Safari, Chrome or Edge).
2. Go to **weather.gov**.
3. Type your city or ZIP code in the box at the top and choose your town.
4. Read the forecast. Any watches or warnings for your area appear in a colored banner at the top.

GOOD TO KNOW

Our local office

Portage County is served by the National Weather Service office in Cleveland. Its page is **weather.gov/cle**, with local forecasts, radar and weather radio information.

TIP

Make it a home screen button

In Safari, open weather.gov for your town, tap the **Share** button, then **Add to Home Screen**. Now the official forecast is one tap away.

PART 4

Weather Radios, Sirens and Tornado Warnings

The little radio that wakes you for a warning, how to program it for Portage County, what the sirens are for, and exactly what to do when a tornado warning sounds.

CHAPTER 18

What a NOAA Weather Radio Does

A **NOAA Weather Radio** is a small radio that listens to a special network of National Weather Service stations. Most of the time it sits silently on the nightstand. When the Weather Service issues a warning for your county, the radio sounds a loud alarm, lights up, and then reads the warning out loud.

Why people love them

- **It wakes you up.** That's the big one. Overnight tornado warnings are exactly what it's for.
- **It doesn't need the internet or a cell signal.** It listens to a radio transmitter.
- **It keeps working in a power outage** on its backup batteries.
- **It covers more than weather.** The network is also called NOAA All Hazards Radio, because officials can use it for other emergencies.

The transmitters that cover Portage County

Station	Location	Frequency	Covers Portage?
KDO94	Akron	162.400 MHz	Yes, Portage is in its alerting area
KHB59	Cleveland area (Chesterland)	162.550 MHz	Yes, Portage is in its alerting area
WWG56	Youngstown	162.500 MHz	Eastern Portage County

TIP

Pick the clearest one

Most radios have seven channels. Try each and keep the one that comes in clearest at your house. For much of Portage County that's Akron; in the eastern part of the county, Youngstown may be stronger.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What it does for you

Peace of mind at night. You can put your phone on silent, sleep soundly, and still trust that a tornado warning for Portage County will get you out of bed.

CHAPTER 19

Buying the Right Weather Radio

Weather radios are sold at hardware stores, big-box stores and online. I don't recommend a particular brand, but I do recommend looking for a few features that make a real difference.

What to look for

Feature	Why it matters
Public Alert logo	The National Weather Service recommends radios certified to the **Public Alert** standard. These meet a set of performance rules.
SAME	Lets you program your county so the radio only alarms for warnings that matter to you. See Chapter 20, *Programming Your Radio for Portage County*.
Battery backup	Keeps the radio working when the power goes out, which is often exactly when you need it.
Alarm and light	A loud tone plus a flashing light or display. Helpful for anyone hard of hearing.
Silent until needed	Public Alert radios can stay muted until a warning comes in.

GOOD TO KNOW

Hand-crank and solar radios

Emergency radios with a hand crank, solar panel and phone-charging port are popular for outages. They're great for listening to news, but many don't wake you for a warning. If a nighttime alarm is what you want, make sure the box says it has an **alert** feature with SAME.

TIP

Plug it in, keep batteries in it

Run a tabletop weather radio on house power with batteries installed as backup. Change the batteries once a year; picking the same day you change your smoke alarm batteries makes it easy to remember.

HEADS UP

About cost

Basic alert radios are generally inexpensive, and prices vary by model and store. You don't need the most expensive one; you need SAME, battery backup and a loud alarm.

CHAPTER 20

Programming Your Radio for Portage County

Every county in the country has a six-digit **SAME code**. When you put your county's code into the radio, it only sounds the alarm for warnings in your county, instead of every county the transmitter serves.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Portage County's SAME code is 039133

The 0 is for the whole county, 39 is Ohio, and 133 is Portage County. Write it on a sticker on the bottom of the radio.

Typical steps (your radio's booklet has the exact buttons)

1. Put batteries in and plug the radio in.
2. Press **Menu** and find the setting for the **channel** or **frequency**. Choose the clearest station from Chapter 18, *What a NOAA Weather Radio Does*.
3. In the menu, find **SAME** or **County**.
4. Choose **Single** (just your county) or **Multiple** (more than one county).
5. Enter the code one digit at a time, usually with the up and down arrows: **0 3 9 1 3 3**.
6. Save it, then exit the menu.
7. Set the alert mode to **tone** or **voice** alarm so it wakes you.

Adding a neighboring county

Storms in our area often move in from the west, so some people also add Summit County to get a few minutes' head start. Find any county's code on the National Weather Service's NOAA Weather Radio county list at weather.gov, or call the Weather Service's SAME number, **1-888-NWR-SAME** (1-888-697-7263). Make sure any county you add is served by the station you're tuned to.

HEADS UP

Wrong station, no alarm

If you program a county the station you're listening to doesn't cover, you won't get warnings for it. When in doubt, stick with 039133 and the Akron or Cleveland station.

TIP

Where to put it

The bedroom is the best spot, close enough to wake you. If reception is weak, try it in a different spot or on a different station, and pull the antenna all the way out if it has one.

CHAPTER 21

Outdoor Sirens: What They Are and Aren't

Many Portage County communities have outdoor warning sirens. During a tornado warning, participating communities sound them. They're a valuable warning, but they have a specific job.

What sirens are for

- Warning people who are **outside**: in the yard, at the park, on the golf course, at a ball game.
- Telling you to **go inside and get more information** right away.

What sirens aren't for

- They are **not designed to be heard indoors**, especially with windows shut, the air conditioning running or the TV on.
- They won't wake you reliably at night.
- They don't tell you what's happening. When you hear one, check your phone, TV, radio or weather radio.

STAY SAFE

Never wait for the siren

If your phone or weather radio gives you a tornado warning, act on it. Don't wait to hear a siren, and don't go outside to listen for one.

GOOD TO KNOW

Siren tests

Ohio holds a statewide tornado drill each spring during Severe Weather Awareness Week, and many communities test their sirens on a regular schedule. Test schedules vary by community; your village, city or township office can tell you yours.

CHAPTER 22

When a Tornado Warning Hits

A tornado warning means a tornado has been reported or radar shows one may be forming. This is the moment all the setup in this guide is for. Don't stop to film it, don't step outside to look. **Go to your safe spot now.**

Where to go

1. **The lowest floor** of a sturdy building. A basement is best.
2. **An interior room** with no windows, like a bathroom, closet or hallway in the middle of the house, if there's no basement.
3. **Put as many walls as possible** between you and the outside.
4. **Cover your head and neck** with your arms, a pillow, a blanket or a helmet.

Take these with you

- Your phone (and a power bank if you can grab it in a second).
- Your weather radio or a battery radio, so you know when the warning ends.
- Shoes. Walking on broken glass afterward is a real hazard.
- Glasses, hearing aids and any medicine you can't go without.

STAY SAFE

If you're in a car or outdoors

Get into a sturdy building if you can. If you truly can't, the last resort is to lie flat in a low spot, like a ditch, and cover your head.

TIP

Practice once, on a sunny day

Walk everyone in the house to the safe spot and time it. If anyone uses a walker or cane, plan the route and keep a chair there. Practice makes the real thing calmer.

GOOD TO KNOW

Stay put until it's over

Stay in your safe spot until the warning expires or officials say it's clear. Your weather radio, phone or TV will tell you.

PART 5

Ohio Winter and Power Outages

Snow, ice and cold, plus a calm plan for when the lights go out: keeping your phone alive, reporting the outage, and knowing what's still safe in the fridge.

CHAPTER 23

Ohio Winter Weather

Northeast Ohio winters bring snow, ice, bitter wind chills and the occasional storm that shuts everything down for a day or two. Your phone and weather apps are a big help here, because winter storms usually come with a few days' notice.

When a winter storm is in the forecast

1. **Check the forecast** in your weather app or at weather.gov a few days out. Look for a winter storm **watch** or **warning** (see Chapter 4, *Watch, Warning, Advisory: What the Words Mean*).
2. **Refill prescriptions** before the storm, not during it.
3. **Charge everything:** phone, power banks, hearing aid batteries or charger, flashlight.
4. **Get groceries and pet food** for a few days.
5. **Postpone travel** if a warning is issued. Appointments can be moved; ice can't be argued with.
6. **Tell family your plan,** and agree on when you'll check in by phone or text.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What your phone adds

Severe weather notifications from your weather app (see Chapter 14, *Rain and Severe Weather Notifications on iPhone* and Chapter 16, *Weather on Google Pixel and Other Android Phones*) can give you a heads-up about a winter storm watch while there's still time to shop and refill prescriptions.

Staying warm safely

- **Never use a gas stove or oven to heat your home.**
- Plug space heaters directly into a wall outlet, never into a power strip or extension cord, and keep them away from anything that can burn.
- Have carbon monoxide alarms with battery backup on every level of your home, and test them.

STAY SAFE

Carbon monoxide is invisible

Carbon monoxide has no color and no smell. If a CO alarm sounds, or you feel dizzy, headachy or sick to your stomach while a heater or generator is running, get to fresh air right away and call 911.

TIP

Look in on neighbors

A quick phone call or text to an older neighbor during a cold snap is a kindness that can matter a great deal.

CHAPTER 24

Getting Ready for a Power Outage

Storms, ice and high winds knock out power around here a few times most years. A little preparation turns a long outage from frightening into merely inconvenient.

Your outage checklist

- **Phones charged** before a storm arrives, and a **power bank** or two kept charged.
- **Flashlights or battery lanterns** with fresh batteries, in a spot you can find in the dark. They're safer than candles.
- **A battery or crank radio**, or your NOAA Weather Radio (see Chapter 18, *What a NOAA Weather Radio Does*).
- **A list of important phone numbers on paper**, in case your phone dies: family, doctor, pharmacy, your electric company's outage line.
- **Water and easy food** for a few days.
- **A plan for medical devices** that need power (see below).

If you rely on medical equipment

If you use oxygen, a CPAP, a powered wheelchair or any device that needs electricity, talk with your doctor and the equipment supplier now about backup batteries and what to do in a long outage. If a device is life-sustaining and the power goes out, seek emergency help.

GOOD TO KNOW

FirstEnergy's medical program

Ohio Edison is part of FirstEnergy, which runs a **Critical Customer Care Program** for customers who rely on life-sustaining equipment. It doesn't promise faster restoration, but enrolled customers can be contacted during long outages. Call **1-800-662-3115** to ask about it; it needs a form from your doctor.

Your home phone

If your home phone comes through your internet or cable company, it stops working in an outage unless it has a backup battery. Cordless phones also need power. Your phone company must offer a backup battery option, usually at your cost. A charged cell phone is the simplest backup.

TIP

Write it on paper

Put your important numbers on an index card in your wallet and another on the fridge. A dead phone shouldn't mean you can't reach your daughter.

CHAPTER 25

Keeping Your Phone Alive in an Outage

When the power is out, your phone becomes your flashlight, your radio, your news and your lifeline all at once. That uses a lot of battery. These steps stretch it out.

On iPhone: Low Power Mode

1. Open **Settings**.
2. Tap **Battery**.
3. Turn on **Low Power Mode**. The battery icon turns yellow.

On Android: Battery Saver

1. Open **Settings**.
2. Tap **Battery**.
3. Turn on **Battery Saver** (Samsung calls it **Power saving**). If you don't see it, search Settings for **battery saver**.

More ways to save battery

- Turn the screen brightness down.
- Close video and games. Streaming video drains a battery fastest.
- Text instead of calling when you can; texts often get through when calls don't.
- Keep the phone warm. Cold drains batteries faster.
- Don't turn on airplane mode for long stretches, because then emergency alerts can't reach you (see Chapter 9, *Not Getting Alerts? Fixes to Try*).

TIP

Power banks

A power bank is a pocket-sized battery that recharges your phone. Charge it fully before storm season and top it off every few months. A typical mid-size one can recharge most phones at least once or twice.

STAY SAFE

Charging in the car

Your car can charge a phone, but only run the engine with the car **outside**, never in a garage, even with the door open. Car exhaust contains carbon monoxide.

CHAPTER 26

During an Outage: Reporting It and Staying Safe

Many homes in Portage County get their power from **Ohio Edison**, part of FirstEnergy. If your electric bill comes from a different company, its outage number is on your bill. Here's how to report an outage to FirstEnergy.

Three ways to report

How	What to do
Text	Text **OUT** to **544487**. If you've never used FirstEnergy texts, first text **REG** to 544487 to sign up. Text **STAT** for an update on your outage.
Call	**1-888-544-4877** (1-888-LIGHTSS).
Online	Use the outage form and the outage map at **firstenergycorp.com/outages**.

STAY SAFE

Downed power lines

Stay at least 30 feet away from a downed line and anything it's touching, like a fence or a puddle. Call 911. Always assume a downed line is live.

Generators

- Run generators **outdoors only**, at least 20 feet from windows, doors and vents.
- Never run one in a garage, basement, porch or carport, even with the door open.
- Never plug a generator into a wall outlet to power the house. A transfer switch installed by a licensed electrician is the safe way.

SCAM ALERT

Callers demanding payment to restore power

After storms, scammers call pretending to be the power company and threaten to cut you off unless you pay now. FirstEnergy says it sends written notices, won't demand immediate payment by phone, and never requires prepaid cards. Hang up and call the number on your bill.

CHAPTER 27

Food, Medicine and the Fridge

One of the first worries in an outage is what's happening inside the refrigerator. Here are the official rules of thumb.

What	How long
Refrigerator	Keeps food cold for about **4 hours** if you keep the door closed.
Full freezer	Holds its temperature for about **48 hours** if the door stays closed.
Throw it out	Food that has been above **40°F for two hours or more**, or that has an unusual smell, color or texture.

TIP

A thermometer settles the question

Keep an appliance thermometer in the fridge and freezer. After the power comes back, it tells you whether food stayed cold enough, so you're not guessing.

Medicines that need the fridge

Some medicines, like insulin, need to stay cool. Ask your pharmacist now what to do with yours if the power is out for a long time, and write the answer on your outage list.

HEADS UP

When in doubt, throw it out

Food poisoning is a bad way to end a storm. If you're unsure whether something stayed cold, don't taste it to check.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

A heads-up helps

When your weather app or a winter storm warning tells you an outage is likely, freeze water bottles and keep the freezer full. A full freezer holds its cold longer.

PART 6

Scams, Family and Getting Help

The scammers who follow bad weather, how to set all this up for a parent, when to call me, and a one-stop cheat-sheet.

CHAPTER 28

Fake Weather Apps and Alert Scams

Bad weather makes people anxious, and scammers know it. Some try to get you to install a fake app; others send texts or make calls dressed up as official warnings. A few simple rules keep you safe.

The rules

1. **Real emergency alerts never ask for money, passwords, card numbers or your Social Security number.** They tell you about a danger and what to do.
2. **Install weather apps only from the App Store or Google Play Store.** Never from a link in a text, email, pop-up or letter, and never by scanning a QR code someone mailed you.
3. **Be wary of weather apps that ask for odd permissions,** like your contacts, your text messages, or "administrator" access. A weather app needs your location and that's about it.
4. **After a disaster, scammers pretend to be government officials, inspectors and utility workers.** Check anyone who contacts you by calling the agency or company yourself, at a number you look up.

SCAM ALERT

"Download our new warning app"

Security agencies have warned about fake letters and messages urging people to install a new "severe weather warning app" through a link or QR code. The app was malware. The real alerts on your phone are already built in; you don't need to install anything to get them.

Checking an app's permissions

1. iPhone: open **Settings**, tap **Apps**, tap the weather app, and look at what it's allowed to use.
2. Android: open **Settings**, tap **Apps**, tap the weather app, then tap **Permissions**.
3. Turn off anything that doesn't make sense for a weather app. If an app won't work without strange permissions, delete it.

TIP

Already clicked a link or installed something?

Don't panic. Delete the app, don't enter any passwords, and if you typed in a password or card number, change the password and call your bank using the number on your card. Then give me a call and we'll check the phone together.

CHAPTER 29

Storm-Chaser Contractor Scams

After a big wind storm, hail or a tree on the roof, you may get a knock on the door from someone offering to fix it today. Some are honest local businesses. Others are "storm chasers" who take a deposit and disappear, or do poor work. The FTC has clear advice.

Red flags

- They want **cash up front**, or payment by wire transfer, gift card, payment app or cryptocurrency.
- They won't show you a **license**, **proof of insurance** or a **written contract**.
- They pressure you to decide **right now**, or say they have "leftover materials" from a nearby job.
- They claim to be with the government, an inspector, or the utility, and say you need to pay them.

Before you hire anyone

1. Call your insurance company first and ask how they want the claim handled.
2. Get **several written estimates**.
3. Search online for the company's name with the words **scam** or **complaint**.
4. Ask for a license and proof of insurance, and check the license with the state or county.
5. Get everything in a **written contract** before work starts.
6. Pay by **credit card** when you can; it gives you more protection than cash.

SCAM ALERT

Fake local businesses online

In 2026 the FTC and Illinois took action against a company that created thousands of online listings for home-repair businesses that didn't really exist, with fake five-star reviews. Glowing reviews alone don't prove a company is real; ask neighbors and friends for names they've actually used.

TIP

Already paid someone?

If you paid a contractor who vanished, report it at **ReportFraud.ftc.gov**, and call your credit card company or bank right away to ask about disputing the charge.

CHAPTER 30

Setting Up Alerts for a Parent

If you're helping an older parent, these settings are some of the most valuable fifteen minutes you can spend together. Do it with their blessing, side by side, and explain each step as you go.

A checklist for a parent's phone

1. Turn on emergency alerts, including **Always Play Sound** on iPhone. See Chapter 6, *Emergency Alerts on iPhone*, Chapter 7, *Emergency Alerts on Google Pixel* or Chapter 8, *Emergency Alerts on Samsung Galaxy*.
2. Turn on severe weather notifications in the weather app. See Chapter 14, *Rain and Severe Weather Notifications on iPhone* or Chapter 16, *Weather on Google Pixel and Other Android Phones*.
3. Add **your** town to their weather app, and theirs to yours, so you each see the other's weather.
4. Install the Portage County EMA app if they live here. See Chapter 11, *Portage County Alerts and the EMA App*.
5. Make sure they have a charged power bank and know how to plug it in.
6. Write the power company's outage number and your number on a card by their phone.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Peace of mind for both of you

When you can see a storm heading toward Mom's town on your own phone, you can call before it hits and remind her where to go.

A weather radio for the bedroom

For a parent who lives alone, a NOAA Weather Radio set up for their county is one of the best gifts you can give. Program it with them (see Chapter 20, *Programming Your Radio for Portage County*) and show them what the alarm sounds like using the radio's test button, if it has one.

TIP

Hard of hearing?

Public Alert radios have both a sound alarm and a visual alarm, such as a flashing light or display. If hearing is a concern, read the box for extras made for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

GOOD TO KNOW

Respect their choices

Some people find alerts frightening. Explain what each one does, and let them decide. Turning AMBER alerts off while keeping weather warnings on is a reasonable middle ground (see Chapter 10, *Should I Turn Any Alerts Off?*).

CHAPTER 31

When to Call Bill

Most of this guide you can do yourself, one step at a time. But sometimes it's easier to have someone sit beside you, or connect to your screen, and walk through it together. That's what my **Device Training** service is for.

Good reasons to call

- You want every phone in the house checked for emergency alerts and weather notifications in one visit.
- You bought a weather radio and the programming buttons are driving you crazy.
- You'd like a parent's phone set up so you can both follow each other's weather.
- Your phone isn't getting alerts and you've tried the fixes in Chapter 9, *Not Getting Alerts? Fixes to Try*.
- You want help building an outage kit: power banks, a radio, and a paper list of numbers.
- You think you installed a fake app or clicked a suspicious link.

SCAM ALERT

Storm damage and strangers at the door

If someone shows up after a storm asking for money up front, take a breath, don't pay, and call someone you trust. I'm happy to be that call when it involves a phone, a link or an app.

How to reach me

Call or text **(330) 200-8042**, or book online at **billshometech.com/book**. Bill's Home Tech serves **Portage County, Ohio**, and I bring more than 30 years of professional experience to every visit. If you reach my assistant **Sophie** on the main line, she can answer simple questions and get you on my schedule.

FROM BILL

What it costs

My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. The guides themselves are free to read and share.

— Bill

CHAPTER 32

Your Weather & Alerts Cheat-Sheet

The settings you'll use most

I want to…	Do this
iPhone emergency alerts	**Settings > Notifications**, scroll to **Government Alerts**.
Pixel emergency alerts	**Settings > Notifications > Wireless emergency alerts**.
Samsung emergency alerts	**Settings > Safety and emergency > Wireless emergency alerts**.
iPhone rain and storm notices	**Weather** app > Location List > More > **Notifications**.
Pixel Weather notices	**Settings > Apps > Pixel Weather > Notifications**.
Radar on iPhone	**Weather** app > tap the map > Overlay Menu > **Precipitation**.

Portage County at a glance

What	Details
Weather radio SAME code	**039133**
Weather radio stations	Akron KDO94 162.400 · Cleveland KHB59 162.550 · Youngstown WWG56 162.500 (east)
Local Weather Service office	NWS Cleveland, **weather.gov/cle**
County alerts	Portage County EMA app (free)
Report an outage (FirstEnergy)	Text **OUT** to **544487**, or call **1-888-544-4877**

When the weather turns

1. Watch means get ready. Warning means act now.
2. Tornado warning: lowest floor, interior room, cover your head. Don't wait for a siren.
3. Stay 30 feet from downed lines and call 911.
4. Generators outdoors only, 20 feet from windows.
5. Never pay a storm contractor in cash up front.

Keep this handy

Item	Write it here
Our tornado safe spot	_____
Electric company outage number	_____
Family member to call	_____
Pharmacy	_____
Weather radio battery last changed	_____

FROM BILL

One last word

You don't have to remember all of this. Set it up once on a calm day, keep this cheat-sheet handy, and call me at (330) 200-8042 whenever you'd like a hand.

— Bill