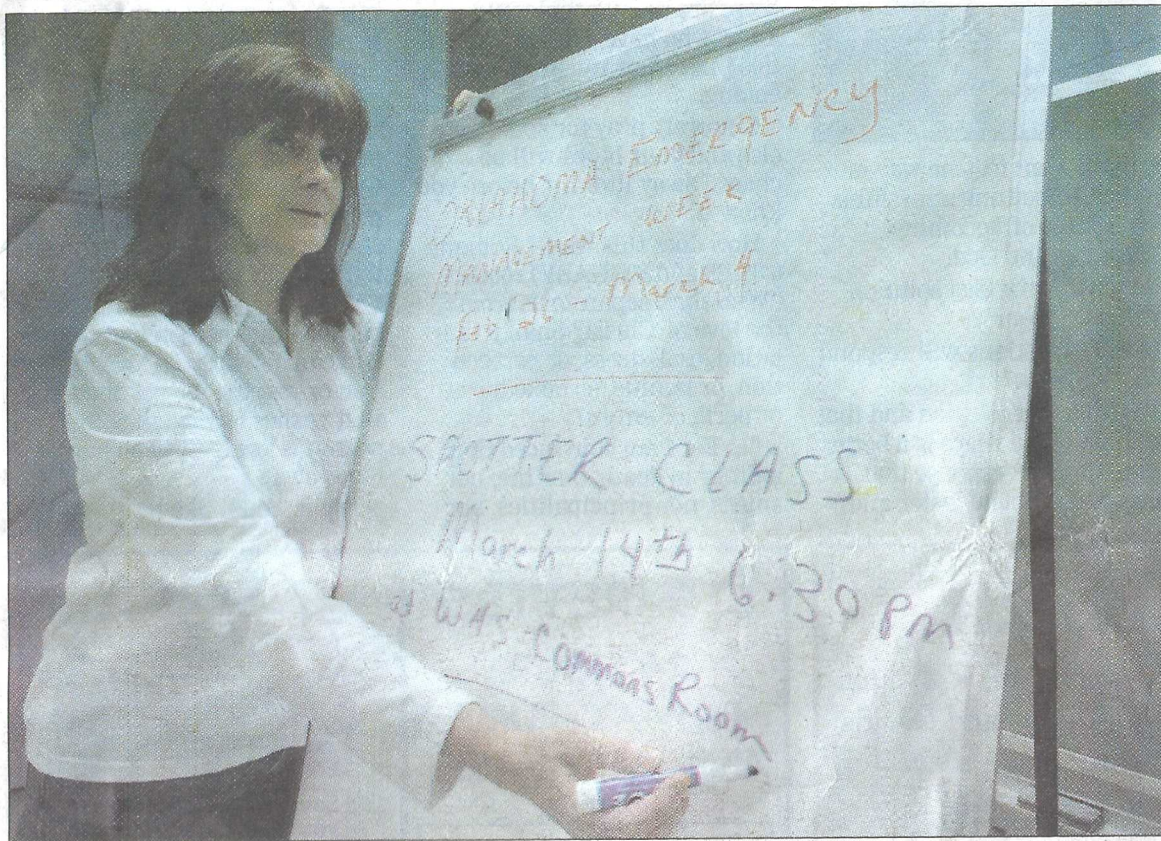


# CountyLine

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Staff photo by KEVIN HARVISON

Latimer County Emergency Management Director Toyé Massey outlines training sessions scheduled for storm watchers and others who help in emergencies.

## Preparing for the worst

**SAFETY** | Latimer County is 'storm ready'

By CARLA PEROVICH

What exactly does having a community that has been designated as StormReady mean?

StormReady is a program that was designed by the National Weather Service's forecast office in Tulsa in 1998. It has now become a nationally recognized program, accrediting agencies in many different states.

There are several conditions that must be met in order for a community to receive the StormReady accreditation. Some of those include:

- Establishing a 24-hour warn-

ing point and Emergency Operations Center.

- Having more than one way to receive severe weather warnings and forecasting alerts to the public.

- Creating a system that monitors local weather conditions.

- Promoting the importance of public readiness through community seminars.

- Developing a formal hazardous weather plan, which includes training severe weather spotters and holding emergency exercises.



# EOC

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Meeting all of these requirements, Wilburton and Latimer County became the first community to ever receive this designation in February 1999.

According to Latimer County Emergency Management Director Toye Massey, it takes a lot of hard work to keep track of storms.

In her office Massey has a number of televisions and computers that are constantly monitoring radar systems from Tulsa and Fort Smith, but one thing she seems particularly proud of is the fact that Latimer County has its own weather radar system.

"We have our own radar, which is located on Hackney Hill," Massey said.

"I get calls from Haskell and other counties wanting to know what sort of weather I am seeing in their areas, since they don't have the radar capabilities that we do here."

Massey is able to broadcast information from this radar, along with storm information and warnings, to the Wilburton community through cable channel 17.

Besides having its own radar, the EOC relies heavily upon the support of local volunteers. Massey praised them, saying "I have a lot of good volunteers, storm watchers, that are out there anytime we're under any type of warning. They're out there watching, they love it and I'm glad they do because they help me out a lot."

She indicated that a lot of her volunteers are firefighters, but she also has ham radio operators who come in to operate the radio in her office, keeping her informed of storms and current weather conditions across the state, as well as storm spotters who drive throughout the county checking weather conditions.

Volunteers receive annual training from the National Weather Service and attend monthly meetings to keep up to date on the most current information.

This year's NWS training is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on March 14 at Wilburton High School. Massey said that anyone who is interested in volunteering may attend.

There is one thing Massey and the EOC would like to make sure everyone is aware of for the upcoming storm season: There are a number of storm shelters located throughout the area.

The Emergency Operations Center can get pretty hectic when making sure everything is being done to get warnings out, so Massey encourages people to use the local shelters instead of the EOC.

She said, "Also, a lot of people don't realize but because we are located under the jail, when there is a really bad storm, we have to bring the prisoners down here."

Volunteers are on hand when severe weather approaches to make sure shelters are open and people have a safe place to go. The following shelters are available:

- First Baptist Church basement
- Church of Christ on state Highway 2 South
- Eastern Oklahoma State College, Gunning Hall basement
- West End (Bowers) Fire Department

Massey and the EOC work hard to ensure that the citizens of Latimer County remain informed during severe weather but more volunteers are always needed.

If you would like more information on the EOC or to become a volunteer, contact Toye Massey, director, at (918) 465-3582 or visit the EOC website at <http://lceoc74578.tripod.com>.