



# UNDERSTAND YOUR WARNING ALARMS

Toolbox Talks for the members of Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities

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Many workplaces have situations where employees must respond in a certain way when they hear a certain sound. In a world where we frequently hear bells, buzzers, beeps and other tones, the message may get lost or ignored. The following checklist, based on the article [The Sounds of Safety](#) by Linda Sherrard, is a reminder to ensure that our alarm system is appropriate for our needs and that employees understand the message being sent.

Is your alarm system designed based on the level and type of hazards present at the site? Is it monitored and updated as needed?

Does your alarm system include compliance with ADA and needs for visual as well as audible alarms? Are supervisors aware of those on site who are hearing-impaired?

Are all employees advised as to what the sounds mean? What about visitors and contractors?

Are employees advised as to actions needed to respond to the alarm, such as evacuation, special PPE, sheltering in place, safe locations for workplace violence situations, etc.?

Is each sound specific to the hazard and do employees understand how to get additional information if needed?

Are employees who wear hearing protection still able to hear the warning sounds? Is an alternative, such as having a watch person in place, available in the event there are problems?

Are employees aware of potential for disciplinary action for disabling alarms that are required, such as a forklift's back-up alarm or turning down the intercom system?



Ensure that warning alarms are in working order or that a back-up system is available.

- Make sure that training is repeated often. Employees that are not familiar with the sounds may become confused and wait to hear further instructions or may simply ignore the alarm and do nothing.