



## Press Release

### For more information, contact:

Tod Pritchard, WEM  
608-219-4008 (cell)  
[tod.pritchard@wisconsin.gov](mailto:tod.pritchard@wisconsin.gov)

Jessica Erickson, AT&T  
608-692-5340 (cell)  
[jessica.erickson@att.com](mailto:jessica.erickson@att.com)

# Tornado Awareness Week: Students at Emerson Elementary Learn How to Be Prepared for Disasters & Emergencies

## *STEP Program Teaches Kids How to Assemble Emergency Kits and Develop an Emergency Plan with Their Families*

**LA CROSSE, Friday, April 21, 2017** – As Wisconsin marks Tornado & Severe Weather Awareness Week, students at Emerson Elementary School learned today how to be prepared to respond in the event of a disaster or emergency.

The students are participating in the STEP, or Student Tools for Emergency Planning, program. The statewide program teaches Wisconsin students how to be prepared for various emergencies and disasters, including blizzards, tornadoes, flooding and storms. The program also shows students how to put together an emergency kit and develop an emergency plan with their families.

“As we enter severe weather season in Wisconsin, it is especially important to make sure our young people know what to do in an emergency or disaster situation,” said Principal Lynda Gruber-Suskey. “The STEP program is a great way to provide our students with the knowledge and life-saving tips they need to respond appropriately in an emergency.”

Students heard from officials from La Crosse County Emergency Management, Wisconsin Emergency Management and AT&T, as well as State Senator Jennifer Shilling, about actions they can take to be prepared in an emergency or disaster situation.

“Disasters and emergencies can happen to anyone at any time, often with little to no warning,” said State Senator Jennifer Shilling. “The STEP program helps prepare our young students so they are not scared should they ever be faced with an emergency situation. It is also a great way to start conversations with families about the emergency plans they should have in their homes.”

The week of April 17-21 has been designated as Tornado & Severe Weather Awareness Week in Wisconsin, with two statewide Tornado Drills planned for April 20. Wisconsin averages 23 tornadoes annually, according to the National Weather Service.

The 2017 STEP program is supported by a \$10,000 donation from AT&T and a \$10,000 donation from the Wisconsin Wireless Association. AT&T has a long-standing commitment to disaster preparedness and business continuity, and is the first company in the nation to earn U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) certification for disaster preparedness. Since 2012, AT&T has provided \$68,000 total to support the STEP program in Wisconsin.

“We know how critical it is to be ready and prepared to respond in the event of a disaster or emergency,” said Scott T. VanderSanden, president of AT&T Wisconsin. “Not only are we proud that our network operations are state-of-the-art when it comes to performing during and after a disaster, but we are also proud to help prepare Wisconsin families to respond to emergencies through our support of the STEP program.”

Teachers are provided with all STEP materials at no cost to the schools, including instructor guides, DVDs and copies of student handouts. All students participating in the program also receive an emergency kit to take home, which includes a flashlight. The basic lesson is only one hour of instruction, but teachers can expand the lessons to cover eight hours of materials.

Wisconsin became the first state in the Midwest to teach the STEP program. Over 40,000 students have participated in STEP since the program began during the 2010-11 school year. Another 12,000 students are expected to participate in the 2016-17 school year in 160 schools around the state.

For more information on the STEP program, please visit <http://readywisconsin.wi.gov/STEP/default.asp> to view a STEP video and download a brochure, or contact Tod Pritchard at [tod.pritchard@wisconsin.gov](mailto:tod.pritchard@wisconsin.gov) or 608-242-3324.

The AT&T Wisconsin Innovation & Investment Award program provides funding to organizations and programs that improve the community by advancing education, enhancing the environment, promoting economic development, or delivering other community services.

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