Deadly tornado visits city during training session.

Imagine a giant twister churning through the heart of Gothenburg.

As sirens wail, you may be huddled safely in your basement.

Outside, violent winds could be ripping out natural gas and power lines and wells that provide water.

Trees could topple and branches could fall onto homes, buildings and streets.

No electricity. No water. No gas. No communication.

And no way for ambulances and fire trucks to get through the city.

Gothenburg fire fighters, city officials and others lived through such a scenario.

At a recent monthly training activity, fire and rescue training officer Kent Kline showed slides of how a tornado devastated Greensburg, KS, in May of 2007.

Kline then simulated a twister cutting a swath through Gothenburg—roughly between Ninth and 20th Streets.

Figuring where each fire fighter and rescue crew member lived and the location of city infrastructure such as electrical substations and wells, he asked what they would do if a tornado sliced through the city.

“We don’t think about tornadoes hitting the middle of Gothenburg or how many people might be affected or pieces of infrastructure wiped out,” Kline said.

In addition to fire fighters, city officials and local law enforcement were invited as were the county sheriff and civil defense director and representatives from gas, rural electric and public power companies.

Each representative then brainstormed about how a devastating tornado would affect their entity.

For example, if the tornado separates the fire hall from the hospital, where and how would the injured be transported?

Without cell towers and electricity, how could fire and rescue be dispatched?

Fire chief Mark Ballmer said some of the newest members of the fire department learned that fire trucks and ambulances go to specific locations with storm spotters whenever the National Weather Service issues severe weather watches.

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