

Tornado and Severe Weather Safety Tips

Each year about a thousand tornadoes touchdown in the US and only a small percentage actually strike occupied buildings. The chances that a tornado will strike a building that you are in are very small, however, and you can greatly reduce the chance of injury by doing a few simple things.

Know the difference between **Watches** and **Warnings**:

- **A TORNADO WATCH** - indicates weather conditions are favorable to the formation of tornadoes, for example during severe thunderstorms. During a TORNADO WATCH, keep an eye on the weather and be prepared to take shelter immediately if conditions worsen.
- **A TORNADO WARNING** – indicates that a tornado funnel has been sighted or indicated by radar. You should take shelter immediately. Because tornadoes can form and move quickly, there may not be time for a warning. That's why it's important to stay alert during severe storms.

One of the most important things you can do to prevent being injured in a tornado is to be **ALERT** to the onset of severe weather. Most deaths and injuries happen to people who are unaware and uninformed. Some of the things you can do to prepare for the unexpected are making an emergency supply kit and developing an emergency plan.

Prevention and Practice Before the Storm

- At home, have a family tornado plan in place, based on the kind of dwelling you live in and the safety tips below.
- Know where you can take shelter in a matter of seconds, and practice a family tornado drill at least once a year.
- Have a pre-determined place to meet after a disaster.
- Flying debris is the greatest danger in tornadoes; so store protective coverings (e.g., mattress, sleeping bags, thick blankets, etc) in or next to your shelter space, ready to use on a few seconds' notice.
- When a tornado watch is issued, think about the drill and check to make sure all your safety supplies are handy (see below for a list of basic disaster supplies). Turn on local TV, radio or NOAA Weather Radio and stay alert for warnings.
- If you shop frequently at certain stores, learn where there are bathrooms, storage rooms or other interior shelter areas away from windows, and the shortest ways to get there.
- All administrators of schools, shopping centers, nursing homes, hospitals, sports arenas, stadiums, mobile home communities and offices should have a tornado safety plan in place, with easy-to-read signs posted to direct everyone to a safe, close-by shelter area. Schools and office building managers should regularly run well-coordinated drills.

When Dangerous Weather Approaches

Avoid the Lightning Threat

- **Have a lightning safety plan.** Know where you'll go for safety and how much time it will take to get there. Make sure your plan allows enough time to reach safety.

- **Postpone activities.** Before going outdoors, check the forecast for thunderstorms. Consider postponing activities to avoid being caught in a dangerous situation.
- **Monitor the weather.** Look for signs of a developing thunderstorm such as darkening skies, flashes of lightning, or increasing wind.
- **Get to a safe place.** If you hear thunder, even a distant rumble, immediately move to a safe place. *When Thunder Roars, Go Indoors!* Fully enclosed buildings with wiring and plumbing provide the best protection. Sheds, picnic shelters, tents or covered porches do not protect you from lightning. If a sturdy building is not nearby, get into a hard-topped metal vehicle and close all the windows. Stay inside until 30 minutes after the last rumble of thunder.
- **If you hear thunder, don't use a corded phone.** Cordless phones, cell phones and other wireless handheld devices are safe to use.
- **Keep away from electrical equipment, wiring and water pipes.** Sensitive electronics should be unplugged well in advance of thunderstorms. Don't take a bath, shower or use plumbing during a thunderstorm.

When Caught Outside During Thunder

There is no safe place outside during a thunderstorm. Plan ahead to avoid this dangerous situation! If you're outside and hear thunder, the only way to significantly reduce your risk of becoming a lightning casualty is to get inside a substantial building or hard-topped metal vehicle as fast as you can. Remember, there is no substitute for getting to a safe place.

- **Avoid open areas and stay away from isolated tall trees, towers, or utility poles.** Do not be the tallest object in the area. Lightning tends to strike the tallest objects in the area.
- **Stay away from metal conductors such as wires or fences.** Metal does not attract lightning, but lightning can travel long distances through it.

Tornado Safety Rules

The safest place to be is an underground shelter, basement, or safe room. If no underground shelter or safe room is available, a small, windowless interior room or hallway on the lowest level of a sturdy building is the safest alternative.

Mobile homes are not safe during tornadoes. Abandon mobile home and go to the nearest sturdy building or shelter immediately. If you are caught outdoors, seek shelter in a basement, shelter or sturdy building.

If you cannot quickly walk to a shelter: Immediately get into a vehicle, buckle your seat belt and try to drive to the closest sturdy shelter. If flying debris occurs while you are driving, pull over and park. Now you have the following options as a last resort:

- *Stay in your vehicle with the seat belt on. Put your head down below the windows, covering with your hands and a blanket if possible.*
- *If you can safely get noticeably lower than the level of the roadway, exit your car, and lie in that area, covering your head with your hands.*

Your choice should be driven by your specific circumstances.

Flash Flood Safety Rules

- Avoid driving, walking, or swimming in flood waters.
- Stay away from high water, storm drains, ditches, ravines, or culverts. Even moving water only six inches deep can knock you off your feet. Move to higher ground.
- Do not let children play near storm drains.
- If you come upon a flooded roadway never drive through it – **Turn Around, Don't Drown.**

After a Tornado or Severe Weather

Keep your family together and wait for emergency personnel to arrive. Carefully render aid to those who are injured. Stay away from power lines and puddles with wires in them; they may still be carrying electricity. Watch your step to avoid broken glass, nails, and other sharp objects. Stay out of any heavily damaged houses or buildings; they could collapse at any time. Do not use matches or lighters, in case of leaking natural gas pipes or fuel tanks nearby. Remain calm and alert, and listen for information and instructions from emergency crews or local officials.

Basic Disaster Supplies Kit

Keep the following items handy in your home in case of a natural disaster, such as a tornado. Keep them in an easy-to-carry backpack or duffel bag near your door in case you need to evacuate quickly. Store your kit in a convenient place known to all family members. And be sure to check your batteries and replace if needed every six months.

- A portable, battery-powered radio or television and extra batteries.
- Flashlight and extra batteries.
- Food and water
- Change of clothing
- First aid kit and first aid manual.
- Supply of prescription medications.
- Credit card and cash.
- Personal identification.
- An extra set of car keys.
- Matches in a waterproof container.
- Map of the area and phone numbers of places you could go.
- Special needs, for example, diapers or formula, prescription medicines and copies of prescriptions, hearing aid batteries, spare wheelchair battery, spare eyeglasses, or other physical needs.

For More Information

Safety and preparedness materials can be viewed and downloaded at:

National Weather Service at: www.weather.gov/safety.php

Federal Emergency Management Agency at: www.ready.gov

American Red Cross at: www.redcross.org