



Tornadoes

Nature's Most Violent Storm Safety Tips

By: Betty Schroeder EMT-P/PI

In an average year, 800 tornadoes are reported nationwide, resulting in 80 deaths and over 1,500 injuries. The most violent tornadoes are capable of tremendous destruction with wind speeds of 250 mph or more. Damage paths can be in excess of one mile wide and 50 miles long. The average tornado moves from southwest to northeast, but tornadoes have been known to move in any direction. The average forward speed is 30 mph but may vary from nearly stationary to 70 mph. Tornado season is generally March through August, but can occur at any time of the year. They tend to occur in the afternoon and evenings, over 80 percent of all tornadoes strike between noon and midnight. Listening to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio, and television for the latest tornado Watches and Warnings. Those who ignore the weather watches or warnings because of indifference or overconfidence may not perceive the danger...

Tornado Watch: Tornadoes are possible in your area. Remain alert for approaching storms.

Tornado Warning: A tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. If a tornado warning is issued for your area and the sky becomes threatening, move to your pre-designated place of safety.

Severe Thunderstorm Watch: Severe thunderstorms are possible in your area.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning: Severe thunderstorms are occurring.

Remember, tornadoes occasionally develop in areas in which a severe thunderstorms watch or warning is in effect. Remain alert to signs of an approaching tornado and seek shelter if threatening conditions exist. Look out for dark, often greenish sky, wall clouds, large hail, loud roar, similar to a freight train. Listen for a strange quiet sound that occurs within or shortly after the thunderstorm. Some tornadoes appear as a visible funnel extending only partially to the ground. Look for signs of debris below the visible funnel. While others tornadoes are obscured by rain or nearby low-hanging clouds. Tornadoes may appear nearly transparent until dust and debris are picked up. Occasionally, two or more tornadoes may occur at the same time. Before thunderstorms develop, a change in wind direction and an increase in wind speed with increasing height create an invisible, horizontal spinning effect in the lower atmosphere. Rising air within the thunderstorm updraft tilts the rotating air from horizontal to vertical. An area of rotation, 2-6 miles wide, now extends through much of the storm. Most strong and violent tornadoes form within this area of strong rotation. Thunderstorms develop in warm, moist air in advance of eastward- moving cold fronts.

Tornado Safety What You Can Do Before The Storm:

- Develop a plan for you and your family.
- Have frequent drills.
- Know the county/parish in which you live, and keep a highway map nearby to follow storms movement from weather bulletins.
- Have a NOAA Weather Radio with a warning alarm tone and battery back-up to receive warnings.
- Listen to radio and television for information.
- If planning a trip outdoors, listen to the latest forecasts and take necessary action if threatening weather is possible.

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If a Warning is issued or if threatening weather approaches:

- In a home or building, move to a pre-designated shelter, such as a basement away from the west and south walls.
 - If an underground shelter is not available, move to an interior room or hallway on the lowest floor and get under a sturdy piece of furniture.
 - Stay away from windows. Keep the windows closed.
 - Get out of automobiles and lie flat in a ditch or low-lying area. Do not climb under a highway overpass.
 - Do not try to outrun a tornado in your car, instead, leave it immediately.
 - Mobile homes, even if tied down, offer little protection from tornadoes and should be abandoned.
- Occasionally, tornadoes develop so rapidly that advance warning is not possible. Remain alert for signs of an approaching tornado. Flying debris from tornadoes causes most deaths and injuries.

A Disaster Supplies Kit Should Includes but not limited to.

- A 3-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and food that won't spoil including a can opener)
- One change of clothing, working gloves and footwear per person.
- One blanket or sleeping bags per person.
- A first-aid kit, including prescription medicines.
- Emergency tools, including a battery-powered NOAA Weather Radio and a portable radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries.
- An extra set of car keys and a credit card or cash.
- Special items for infant, elderly, or disable family members.
- Written instructions on how to turn off electricity, gas, and water if authorities advise you to do so. (Remember, you'll need a professional to turn natural gas service back on).

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For More Information Contact:

The U. S. Fire Administration
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