

## SEVERE WEATHER

There are multiple types of severe weather that can impact Prince George's County on a seasonal basis.

The County is most susceptible to winter storms and strong to severe rain and thunderstorms. Winter storms can include severe cold temperatures, sleet, freezing rain, and snowfall amounts that make travel difficult and hazardous. Severe thunderstorms can include damaging hail, high winds that cause tree damage and power outages, and heavy rain that could cause flash or localized flooding.

Severe weather alerts are issued using three categories:

Weather **ADVISORY** is a special weather alert to the public that conditions are possible for a storm to develop in the area.

Severe weather **WATCH** means the conditions are favorable for the development of severe storms in and close to the watch area.

Severe weather **WARNING** means a severe storm is confirmed to be producing damage and is moving into and through the warned area.

The best response to severe weather in most cases is to shelter-in-place. Therefore, it is critically important to have an emergency kit at home that meets you and your family's needs, an emergency kit at work in case you have to stay until after the storm has passed and in your car in case you are stranded on the road during an unexpected storm.

Additionally, staying informed by receiving emergency weather alerts is very important as the information in the alerts will provide you with guidance as to how severe the storm is and how you can best respond to the event. Sign up for Alert Prince George's at <http://alert.mypgc.us> to receive up-to date emergency alert information.

Lastly, having a written emergency plan will provide you and your family with the communication tools to stay in-touch during severe weather events. Go to [www.ready.gov/make-a-plan](http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan) for tips and templates that will help you create a written emergency plan.

## HURRICANES

A hurricane is a type of tropical cyclone that forms in the southern Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, Gulf of Mexico, and in the eastern Pacific Ocean, with a maximum sustained winds of 74 mph or more. The Atlantic Hurricane Season runs from June 1st- November 30th each year with peak season from mid-August to late October.

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Hurricanes are measured on the Saffir-Simpson Wind Scale, with a Category 1 being the weakest and a Category 5 being the strongest.

Hurricanes can cause catastrophic damage to coastlines and several hundred miles inland. They can produce winds exceeding 155 mph as well as tornadoes, microbursts, and rip currents. In addition, hurricanes can create storm surges along the coast and cause extensive damage from heavy rainfall.

## **Before a Hurricane:**

- Learn the elevation level of your property and whether the land is flood-prone. This will help you know how your property will be affected when storm surge or tidal flooding are forecasted.
- Identify levees and dams in your area and determine whether they pose a hazard to you.
- Learn community hurricane evacuation routes and how to find higher ground. Determine where you would go and how you would get there if you needed to evacuate.
- Make plans to secure your property and cover all of your home's windows.
- Be sure trees and shrubs around your home are well trimmed so they are more wind resistant.
- Clear loose and clogged rain gutters and downspouts.
- Reinforce your garage doors; if wind enters a garage it can cause dangerous and expensive structural damage.
- Plan to bring in all outdoor furniture, decorations, garbage cans and anything else that is not tied down.
- Make a record of your personal property (pictures and videos) and store these documents in a safe place.

## **During a Hurricane:**

- Turn off utilities if instructed to do so. Otherwise, turn the refrigerator thermostat to its coldest setting and keep its doors closed.
- Avoid using the phone, except for serious emergencies.
- Ensure a supply of water for sanitary purpose such as cleaning and flushing toilets. Fill the bathtub and other larger containers with water.
- Stay inside, away from windows, skylights, and glass doors.

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## You should evacuate under the following conditions:

- If you are directed by local authorities to do so. Be sure to follow their instructions.
- If you live in a mobile home or temporary structure—such shelter are particularly hazardous during hurricane no matter how well fastened to the ground.
- If you live in a high-rise building—hurricane winds are stronger at higher elevations.

## After a Hurricane:

- Stay alert for extended rainfall and subsequent flooding even after the hurricane or tropical storm has ended.
- If you evacuated, return home only when officials say it is safe.
- Drive only if necessary and avoid flooded roads and washed out bridges. Stay off the streets. If you must go out watch for fallen objects; downed electrical wires; and weakened walls, bridges, roads, and sidewalks.
- Keep away from loose or dangling power lines and report them immediately to the power company.
- Walk carefully around the outside your home and check for loose power lines, gas leaks, and structural damage before entering.
- Inspect your home for damage. Take pictures of damage, both of the building and its contents, for insurance purposes. If you have any doubts about safety, have your residence inspected by a qualified building inspector or structural engineer before entering.
- Avoid drinking or preparing food with tap water until you are sure it's not contaminated.
- Check refrigerated food for spoilage. If in doubt, throw it out.
- Wear protective clothing and be cautious when cleaning up to avoid injury.
- Never use a generator inside homes, garages, crawlspaces, sheds, or similar areas, even when using fans or opening doors and windows for ventilation. Deadly levels of carbon monoxide can quickly build up in these areas and can linger for hours, even after the generator has shut off.

## TORNADOES

A tornado is a violent windstorm characterized by a twisting, funnel-shaped cloud. It is spawned by a thunderstorm (or sometimes as a result of a hurricane) and produced when cool air overrides a layer of warm air, forcing the warm air to rise rapidly. Tornadoes may strike quickly, with little to no warning.

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## Before a Tornado:

- Pre-identify a place to take shelter such as a basement, center hallway, bathroom, or closet on the lowest floor.

## Look for the following danger signs:

- Dark, often greenish sky
- Large hail
- A large, dark, low-lying cloud (particularly if rotating)
- Loud roar, similar to a freight train.
- If you see approaching storms or any of the danger signs, be prepared to take shelter immediately.

## During a Tornado:

### If Indoors:

- Seek shelter in a windowless interior room, basement, or the lowest level of the building.
- Close hallway doors to shield the corridors from flying debris and stay away from windows.
- Get under and hold on to a piece of sturdy furniture, such as a workbench, heavy table, or desk.
- Use your arms to protect your head and neck.
- Get out and find shelter elsewhere if you're in a mobile home.

### If Outdoors:

- Get inside a building or shelter, if possible.
- If shelter is not available or there is no time to get indoors, lie in a ditch or low-lying area and use your arms to protect your head and neck.

### If in a Vehicle:

- Never try to outrun a tornado in urban or congested areas. Get out of the car immediately and take shelter in a nearby building.
- If there is no time to get indoors, get out of the car and lie in a ditch or low-lying area away from the vehicle. Be aware of the potential for flooding.

## After a Tornado:

- Check for injuries and provide first aid and CPR, if you are trained to do so.

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- Call 911 to report injuries and emergencies caused by the storm. Report locations of trapped persons; make note of persons with injuries and/or people with access and functional needs in need of assistance.
- Watch out for broken glass and fallen power lines. Do not enter damaged areas until you are told it is safe to do so.
- Do not use candles or an open flame; combustibles may be present.
- Use caution when entering a damaged building.

## THUNDERSTORMS

A thunderstorm is formed from a combination of moisture, rapidly rising warm air, and a force capable of lifting air, such as a warm or cold front. A thunderstorm is classified as severe if it produces hail at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch in diameter, has winds of 58 mph or higher, or produces a tornado.

### Before a Thunderstorm:

- Secure outdoor objects, such as lawn furniture, and take light objects inside to avoid loss or damage.
- Look around your home and remove dead or rotting trees and branches that could fall and cause injury or damage.
- Secure windows and doors and unplug electronic equipment before the storm arrives.

### During a Thunderstorm:

If Indoors:

- Do not handle any electrical equipment or corded telephones because lightning could follow the wire. TV sets are particularly dangerous at this time.
- Avoid bathtubs, water faucets, and sinks because metal pipes can transmit electricity.
- Turn off the air conditioner.
- Stay away from windows and doors, and stay off porches.

If Outdoors:

- If you are boating or swimming, get to land and find shelter immediately. Try to get into a building or car. If no structure is available, get to an open space and squat low to the ground as quickly as possible.
- If you are in the woods, find an area protected by a low clump of trees—never stand underneath a single large tree in the open.

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- Avoid tall structures, such as towers, fences, telephone lines, or power lines.
- Avoid lightning rods, such as golf clubs, tractors, fishing rods, bicycles, etc.
- If you feel your hair stand on end (which may indicate that lightning is about to strike you), squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands over your ears and your head between your knees. Do not lie flat on the ground.

If in a Vehicle:

- Safely pull onto the shoulder of the road away from any trees that could possibly fall on your vehicle; turn on your emergency flashers and stay in your vehicle.

**After a Thunderstorm:**

- Call 911 to report life-threatening emergencies only, not damage or power outages.
- Drive only as necessary. Debris and washed-out roads may make driving dangerous.
- Never drive through a flooded roadway. Turn around, don't drown!
- Help people who may need special assistance, such as infants, children, the elderly, and people with access and functional needs.

## FLOODING

Flooding is the nation's most common natural disaster. If you live in a low-lying area, near water, downstream from a dam or other areas known to flood, make sure you're prepared to evacuate. Even six inches of swiftly moving water can knock someone off their feet.

**Before a Flood:**

- Know your neighborhood flood history and low-lying areas. Determine if your home and workplace are in a flood plain.
- Talk to your insurance provider to determine if you need flood insurance.
- If you are in a high risk area, elevate the furnace, water heater, and electric panel in your home.
- Construct barriers to stop floodwaters from entering the building and seal walls in basements with waterproofing compounds.
- When conditions indicate the potential for flooding, get out of low-lying areas.

**During a Flood:**

- Move to higher ground immediately. Do not wait for instructions to leave but if told to evacuate, do so immediately. Always stay away from floodwaters.

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- If you must walk in water, walk where water is not moving; use a stick to check the depth.
- Be aware of streams, drainage channels and other areas known to flood suddenly. Flash floods can occur in these areas without warning.
- Stay inside away from downed power lines to avoid the risk of electric shock or electrocution.
- Turn off utilities, if you are instructed to do so.
- Disconnect electrical appliances. Do not touch electrical equipment if you are wet or standing in water.

#### If in a Vehicle:

- Stop and take an alternate route. The depth, current and condition of the road are all unknowns and can be deadly.
- If your vehicle stalls on a flooded road and water is rising, get out of the car, call 911 and move to higher ground.
- Two feet of swift water can move or float most vehicles, including SUV's and pickup trucks.
- Be especially cautious during periods of low visibility when it is difficult to see and judge conditions—if windshield wipers are on, state law requires headlights.
- Keep your vehicle parked in your garage or on the driveway away from low-lying areas and large drains.

#### After a Flood:

- Follow the instructions of authorities and obey posted warnings. Stay away from damaged areas unless your assistance has been specifically requested by police, fire, or a relief organization.
- Wait for officials to determine if the water is safe to drink.
- Throw away water and food that has come into contact with floodwater.
- Check for utility outages. Utilities will have to be turned back on by a professional.
- Consider asking a professional to evaluate your home for mold.
- Use bleach to clean up—it is effective in killing germs, and can also be used to purify water to drink (10-20 drops of plain bleach per gallon of water).

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## EARTHQUAKES

An earthquake is a sudden, rapid shaking of the earth caused by the breaking and shifting of rock beneath the earth's surface. Earthquakes strike suddenly, with little or no warning, and can occur at any time of the year, day, or night. Earthquakes are rare events in Maryland, but not unprecedented.

### Before an Earthquake:

- Identify safe places such as under a sturdy piece of furniture or against an interior wall. Practice how to "Drop, Cover, and Hold On!"
- Secure items that could fall and cause injuries (e.g., bookshelves, mirrors, light fixtures).

### During an Earthquake:

- Implement the "Drop, Cover, and Hold on" method
- Stay where you are until the shaking stops. Do not run outside. Do not get in a doorway as this does not provide protection from falling or flying objects, and you may not be able to remain standing.
- Drop down onto your hands and knees and cover your head and neck with your arms to protect yourself from falling debris.
- Hold on to any sturdy covering so you can move with it until the shaking stops.
- People who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices should lock their wheels and remain seated until the shaking stops. Protect your head and neck with your arms, a pillow, a book, or whatever is available.
- If you are outdoors when the shaking starts, move away from buildings, streetlights, and utility wires.
- If you are in a moving vehicle, stop as quickly and safely as possible and stay in the vehicle. Avoid stopping near or under buildings, trees, overpasses, and utility wires.

### After an Earthquake:

- When the shaking stops, look around. If there is a clear path to safety, leave the building and go to an open space away from damaged areas.
- If you are trapped, do not move around or kick up dust. Tap on a pipe or wall so rescuers can locate you.
- If you have a cell phone with you, call or text for help.
- Once safe, monitor local news reports via battery operated radio, TV, social media, and cell phone text alerts for emergency information and instructions.

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## WINTER STORMS

Winter storms can include high winds, freezing rain, sleet, heavy snowfall, and extreme cold. Severe winter storms can cause blocked roads, downed power lines and trees, power outages, and transportation accidents. In most cases, approaching winter storms are forecasted a day or two (or more) in advance. If there is a possibility that you may be staying in your home for several days, you need to make sure you have plenty of supplies and medicines.

### Before a Winter Storm:

- Ensure you have rock salt on hand to melt ice on walkways and sand to generate temporary traction. Have a snow shovel or other snow removal equipment on hand.
- Make sure your emergency kit is stocked. Ensure you have an emergency kit in your car.
- Make sure your car's fuel tank is full.
- Insulate walls and attic.
- Keep pipes from freezing by wrapping them in insulation or layers of newspaper, then cover with plastic to keep out moisture.
- Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows.
- Bring pets/companion animals inside during winter weather. Move other animals or livestock to sheltered areas with non-frozen drinking water.

### During a Winter Storm:

- Stay inside and only travel if absolutely necessary.
- If you must go outside, dress in layers and walk carefully on snowy or icy walkways.
- If you are using alternative heat, follow fire safety guideline and ensure proper ventilation.
- Close off any unused rooms. Put towels at the base of doors.
- If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation or layers of newspapers and wrap pipes in rags. Completely open all faucets and pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold (or where the cold was most likely to penetrate).
- Eat nutritious foods and drink plenty of fluids to provide energy and stay hydrated.

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## After a Winter Storm:

- Assist neighbors who may need assistance, such as the elderly, people with infants, or those with access and functional needs.
- Remove ice and snow from tree limbs, roof, and other structures.
- When shoveling snow, avoid overexertion. Colder temperatures add strain to the heart, and can make strenuous activity feel less tiring. Be attentive to signs of dehydration.
- When outdoors, wear layers of warm, loose-fitting, lightweight clothing. Layers can be removed to prevent chill.
- Watch for signs of frostbite, such as loss of feeling and a pale appearance in fingers, toes, nose and earlobes. If these signs are present, seek immediate medical attention.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia, including uncontrollable shivering, slow or slurred speech, exhaustion, and stumbling. If these are detected, get to a warm location, remove wet clothing and drink warm, non-alcoholic beverages. Seek medical attention immediately.