

OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



Tornado Disaster Response

Background

Tornadoes are violent storms that can strike anywhere, at any time and with little warning. In an average year, 1,200 tornadoes cause 60-65 fatalities and 1,500 injuries nationwide.

Know the difference between a *watch* and a *warning*:

- A *tornado WATCH* means a tornado is possible.
- A *tornado WARNING* means a tornado has been sighted or detected by weather radar - **TAKE SHELTER IMMEDIATELY!**

Tornado Facts

- Tornadoes may appear nearly transparent until dust and debris are picked up or a cloud forms within the funnel.
- Tornadoes typically travel Southwest to Northeast, but they can move in any direction and can suddenly change their direction of motion.
- The average speed of a tornado is 30 mph but may vary from nearly stationary to 70 mph.
- The strongest tornadoes have rotating winds of up to 300 mph.
- Waterspouts are tornadoes that form over warm water. Waterspouts can move on-shore and cause damage to coastal areas.
- No geographic location is "safe" from tornadoes.
- Peak tornado season in the southern states is March through May.
- Peak tornado season in the northern states is late spring through early summer.
- Tornadoes are most likely to occur between 3p.m. and 9p.m, but can occur at any time.

Before the Tornado

Be alert to changing weather conditions.

- Listen to a NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio, television newscasts or look for NotifyMe Alerts for the latest information from officials.
- Have your emergency kit prepared
- Watch for changing weather patterns.
- 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.
- If you are in a building, house or other structure with windows; leave the windows closed and take shelter in a basement, safe room, other windowless interior room or hallway.
- If you reside in a mobile home, abandon your mobile home to seek shelter in a sturdy building immediately.

During a Tornado

If in a structure (Example: Residence, School, Hospital, Shopping Center, High-rise building):

- Go to a pre-designated shelter area such as a safe room, basement, storm cellar, or the lowest building level.
- If there is no basement, go to the center of an interior room on the lowest level (closet, interior hallway) away from corners, windows, doors, and outside walls. Put as many walls as possible between you and the outside.
- Get under a sturdy table and use your arms to protect your head and neck. Do not open windows.

During a Tornado (Continued)

If in a vehicle, trailer, or mobile home:

- Get out immediately and go to the lowest floor of a nearby structure or a storm shelter.
- Mobile homes, even if tied down, offer little protection from tornadoes.

If outside, with no shelter:

- Lie flat in a nearby ditch or depression and cover your head with your hands. Be aware of the potential for flooding.
- If you are in your vehicle driving, stay in the car with the seat belt on. Put your head down below the windows; cover your head with your hands and a blanket, coat or other cushion is possible.
- If you can safely get noticeably lower than the level of the roadway, leave your car and lie in that area, covering your head with your hands.
- Do not get under an overpass or bridge. You are safer in a low, flat location.
- Never try to outrun a tornado in urban or congested areas in a car or truck. Instead, leave the vehicle immediately for safe shelter.
- Watch out for flying debris. Flying debris from tornadoes causes most fatalities and injuries.

After a Tornado

Recovering from a disaster is usually a gradual process. Safety is a primary issue, along with mental and physical well-being.

- Check for injuries of yourself and anyone around you.
- Do not attempt to move seriously injured people unless they are in immediate danger of further injury. Get medical assistance immediately.
- If you are trapped, try to attract attention to your location.
- Continue to monitor your NOAA Weather Radio, cell phone for text or email alerts or television for emergency notifications.
- Be careful when entering any structure that has been damaged.
- Wear sturdy shoes or boots, long sleeves and gloves when handling or walking on or near debris.
- Be aware of hazards from exposed nails and broken glass.
- Do not touch downed power lines or objects in contact with downed lines. Report electrical hazards to the police and utility company.
- Use battery-powered lanterns, if possible, rather than candles or fire places to light homes without electrical power. If you use candles, make sure they are in safe holders away from curtains, paper, wood or other flammable items. Never leave a candle burning unattended.
- Never use generators, pressure washers, grills, camp stoves or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside your home, basement, garage, camper or outside near an open window, door or vent. Carbon monoxide (CO), is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if you breathe it. (Seek medical attention immediately).
- Respond to requests for volunteer assistance by Police, Fire Fighters, Emergency Management and Relief Organizations, but do not go into damaged areas unless assistance has been requested. Your presence could hamper relief efforts and you could endanger yourself.

When Inspecting the Damage :

Be aware that structural damage may have occurred; this includes possible electrical or gas-leaks hazards. Contact your local city or county building inspectors for information on structural safety codes and standards.

- In general, if you suspect any damage to your home, shut off electrical power, natural gas and propane tanks to avoid fire, electrocution or explosions.
- If it is dark when you are inspecting your home, use a flashlight rather than a candle or torch to avoid the risk of fire or explosion in a damaged home.
- If you see frayed wiring or sparks, or if there is an odor of something burning, you should immediately shut off the electrical system at the main circuit breaker if you have not done so already.

If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open all windows and leave the house immediately. Notify the gas company, the police or fire departments, or State Fire Marshal's office and do not turn on lights, light matches, smoke or do anything that could cause a spark. Do not return to your house until you are told it is safe to do so.