

Tornado

What Is A Tornado?

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. The damage from a tornado is a result of the high wind velocity and wind-blown debris. Tornado season is generally March through August, although tornadoes can occur at any time of year. They tend to occur in the afternoons and evenings: over 80 percent of all tornadoes strike between noon and midnight.

When a tornado threatens, individuals need to have a safe place to go and time to get there. Even with advances in meteorology, warning times may be short or sometimes not possible. Lives are saved when individuals receive and understand the warning, know what to do, and know the safest place to go.

Tornadoes

When a tornado is coming, you have only a short amount of time to make life-or-death decisions. Advance planning and quick response are the keys to surviving a tornado.

Before a Tornado: How to Plan

Conduct tornado drills each tornado season.

Designate an area in the home as a shelter, and practice having everyone in the family go there in response to a tornado threat.

Discuss with family members the difference between a "tornado watch" and a "tornado warning."

Contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter for more information on tornadoes.

MITIGATION

Mitigation includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in preventive mitigation steps now, such as checking local building codes and ordinances about wind-resistant designs and strengthening unreinforced masonry, will help reduce the impact of tornadoes in the future. For more information on mitigation, contact your local emergency management office.

Have disaster supplies on hand:

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water
- Nonelectric can opener

- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes

Develop an emergency communication plan

In case family members are separated from one another during a tornado (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back together.

Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.

Tornado Watches and Warnings

A tornado watch is issued by the National Weather Service when tornadoes are possible in your area. Remain alert for approaching storms. This is time to remind family members where the safest places within your home are located, and listen to the radio or television for further developments.

A tornado warning is issued when a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar.

Mobile Homes

Mobile homes are particularly vulnerable. A mobile home can overturn very easily even if precautions have been taken to tie down the unit. When a tornado warning is issued, take shelter in a building with a strong foundation. If shelter is not available, lie in ditch or low-lying area a safe distance away from the unit.

Tornado Danger Signs

Learn these tornado danger signs:

- An approaching cloud of debris can mark the location of a tornado even if a funnel is not visible.
- Before a tornado hits, the wind may die down and the air may become very still.
- Tornadoes generally occur near the trailing edge of a thunderstorm. It is not uncommon to see clear, sunlit skies behind a tornado.

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What to Do During a Tornado

If at home:

- If you have a tornado safe room or engineered shelter go there immediately.
- Go at once to a windowless, interior room; storm cellar; basement; or lowest level of the building.

- If there is no basement, go to an inner hallway or a smaller inner room without windows, such as a bathroom or closet.
- Get away from the windows.
- Get under a piece of sturdy furniture such as a workbench or heavy table or desk and hold on to it.
- Use arms to protect head and neck.
- If in a mobile home, get out and find shelter elsewhere.

If at work or school:

- Go to the area designated in your tornado plan.
- Avoid places with wide-span roofs such as auditoriums, cafeterias, large hallways, or shopping malls.
- Get under a piece of sturdy furniture such as a workbench or heavy table or desk and hold on to it.
- Use arms to protect head and neck.

If outdoors:

- If possible, get inside a building.
- If shelter is not available or there is no time to get indoors, lie in a ditch or low-lying area or crouch near a strong building. Be aware of the potential for flooding.
- Use arms to protect head and neck.

If in a car:

- Never try to out-drive a tornado in a car or truck.
- 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.

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After a Tornado

- Help injured or trapped persons.

- Give first aid when appropriate.
- Don't try to move the seriously injured unless they are in immediate danger of further injury.
- Call for help.
- If you smell gas, do not turn on any appliances or switches. This includes using phones, flashlights or a cell phone.
- Turn on radio or television to get the latest emergency information.
- Stay out of damaged buildings. Return home only when authorities say it is safe.
- Use the telephone only for emergency calls.
- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, or gasoline or other flammable liquids immediately. Leave the buildings if you smell gas or chemical fumes.
- Take pictures of the damage--both to the house and its contents--for insurance purposes.

Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance--infants, the elderly, and people with disabilities.