

TOOLBOX TALKS

Tornado Safety Tips

Before entering into the realm of tornado safety tips, please note that tornadoes are incredibly unpredictable phenomena. We can take steps to protect ourselves from their destruction, but sometimes tornadoes are so powerful that even these steps can be ineffective. Even though, these tips don't always save property or lives, many more lives could be lost if safety measures are not taken. The good news is that most tornadoes have short lives, and, though they are unpredictable, most cause only a rather small area of destruction.

Tornado Preparation:

-A plan of action is very important when preparing for tornado season. These plans vary from house to house according to the type of structure a family lives in.

-Make sure that there are protective materials (blankets, pillows, mattresses, etc.) that are easily accessible near your sheltering place to protect yourself and your family from flying debris.

-Families need to practice their plan of action at least once a year so that they can initiate their plan of action within seconds if need be.

-Families need to designate a meeting place after the disaster occurs.

-When a tornado watch is issued for your area, review the safety plan. Tune into local TV, and/or radio stations, or an NOAA Weather Radio to remain on top of late breaking warnings and safety issues. It is also a good idea that battery operated radio be kept handy, in case electricity is lost.

-Don't worry about opening the windows to equalize pressure within the house. There is no evidence that this actually makes a difference during a storm. In both situations, windows get broken.

-Think about the safety measures that you would take out in public. Where would you go if you were in the local grocery store or post office? What would you do if you were at a park or other public function? Especially (but not limited to) if the threat of tornadoes has been predicted, ask employees what their specific plan of action is for tornadoes, including where the nearest designated shelters are. 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 shelter. Many of these places also often run emergency drills to prepare for such instances. It is important to think about these situations before you actually find yourself in the middle of them.

-When or if you should decide to build or buy a home, and live East of the Rocky Mountains, you should pay attention to the type of shelter that is offered. Underground shelters such as basements or tornado cellars are the best choice. If those are not an option, make sure that there is a sturdy, interior room or closet on the ground floor that could serve as a shelter room.



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Signs of an Impending Tornado: Although the National Weather Service, through many technological advances, can predict the occurrence of a tornado or a tornado outbreak. All of these advances still do not take the place of watching the skies. Even the National Weather Service relies on people to physically monitor weather situations by following potentially dangerous storms. There are several conditions that they watch for that indicates the imminent formation of a tornado. These conditions are listed below. Please remember that a visible funnel is not a necessary thing for an actual tornado to occur.

- Strong, persistent rotation in the cloud base.
- Whirling dust or debris on the ground under a cloud base -- tornadoes sometimes have no funnel!
- Hail or heavy rain followed by either dead calm or a fast, intense wind shift. Many tornadoes are wrapped in heavy precipitation and can't be seen.
- Day or night - Loud, continuous roar or rumble, which doesn't fade in a few seconds like thunder.
- Night - Small, bright, blue-green to white flashes at ground level near a thunderstorm (as opposed to silvery lightning up in the clouds). These mean power lines are being snapped by very strong wind, maybe a tornado.
- Night - Persistent lowering from the cloud base, illuminated or silhouetted by lightning - especially if it is on the ground or there is a blue-green-white power flash underneath.

If a Tornado is Imminent:

In a house with a basement: Stay away from windows. Move to the basement and seek shelter under heavy furniture. Cover your body with a shield of insulating material such as heavy blankets, pillows, or mattresses. Be sure to protect your head and neck. Avoid sheltering in areas where there are heavy objects on the floor above. These things could break through and crush you.

In a house with no basement, a dorm, or an apartment: Stay away from windows. Go to the lowest floor, to an interior room (like a bathroom or closet), under a stairwell, or in an interior hallway. Make sure there are no windows. Make yourself as small as possible by crouching into a ball like position. Cover your head and neck with your hands. Attempt to protect yourself with thick blankets and pillows to guard against falling debris. A bath tub may offer a shell of partial protection.

In an office building, hospital, nursing home or skyscraper: Go to enclosed, windowless, interior room. Then crouch down and cover your head and neck with your hands. If you can find an interior stairwell that is not too crowded, take shelter there by crouching and covering your head and neck. If there is time, make your way down the stairwell, to a lower level. Stay off the elevators; you could be trapped in them if the power is lost.

In a mobile home: Under no condition should you remain in a mobile home!!! Being outside is a better alternative to remaining in a mobile home. Mobile homes are much lighter and much more easily destroyed than other structures. If you have time, go to a designated tornado shelter.



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If not, look for a sturdy permanent building within easy running distance, and seek shelter there. If even this is impossible, lie flat on the ground and protect your head and neck. Try to lie in an area where there are not any types of power lines near you to avoid electrical shock should the lines fall.

At school: Schools are required to have a tornado safety plan of action and must have regular drills to test this plan. If there is a tornado, follow the practiced plan of action. Once you take shelter, which is often an interior room or hallway, crouch low, head down, and protect the back of your head with your arms. Stay away from windows and large open rooms like gyms and auditoriums.

In a car or truck: Vehicles are extremely dangerous in a tornado. Only try to drive out of the tornado's path, if there is considerable distance between your vehicle and the tornado, if traffic is light, and you have the ability to make right angle turns away from the tornado. If this is not an option, park the car as quickly and safely as possible, out of traffic. [It is safer to get the car out of mud later if necessary than to cause a crash.] Get out of the car and seek shelter in a sturdy building. If in the open country, run to low ground away from any cars (which may roll over on you). Lie flat and face-down, protecting the back of your head with your arms. Avoid seeking shelter under bridges, which can create deadly traffic hazards while offering little protection against flying debris. It has actually been proven that pressures increase under structures such as bridges and highway over passes, and can be even more dangerous than remaining in the open.

In the open outdoors: Try to find shelter in a sturdy building. If not, lie flat and face-down on low ground, protecting the back of your head and neck with your arms and hands. Stay away from trees, power lines, and other large objects that could become debris and dangerous.

In a shopping mall or large store: Remain calm. Watch for others, who may start to panic and become dangerous to yourself and others. Move as quickly as possible to an interior bathroom, storage room or other small enclosed area, away from windows.

In a church or theater: Remain calm. Watch for others, who may start to panic and become dangerous to yourself and others. If possible, move quickly but orderly to an interior bathroom or hallway, away from windows. Crouch face-down and protect your head with your arms. If there is no time to do that, get under the seats or pews, protecting your head with your arms or hands.

AFTER THE TORNADO...

Try to meet your family in a single predestined place and wait for emergency personnel. Carefully provide help to those who are injured. Watch for and 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.



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