Tornado Safety Basics – Seasonal Safety



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What's At Stake

The tornado season in North America begins in April, peaks in June and July, and ends in September. But really the storms can occur at any time, with approximately 1,000 tornadoes being reported in the United States and 80 in Canada each year.

What's The Danger

Tornadoes can move as fast as 70 miles per hour (112 km/h) and produce winds of more than 250 mph (400 km/h). They cause many deaths and injuries every year, as well as a great deal of property damage. Because tornadoes can develop very rapidly, it's vital that people know what to do to reduce the risk to their personal safety and property.

Example

On April 27, 2011 a series of tornadoes swept through the southern United States. About 300 people were killed. According to the National Weather Service, approximately 150 tornadoes tore through parts of Mississippi and Alabama on that one day alone.

How To Protect Yourself

Some tornadoes occur without a tornado warning. And sometimes the warnings are missed. So it's important to recognize these signs of a tornado:

- Powerful thunderstorms marked by frequent flashes of lightning;
- Strong rotation in a cloud base;
- Whirling dust or debris on the ground, beneath a cloud base;
- Heavy precipitation followed by either calm or an intense wind shift;
- A loud and continuous roar, which, unlike thunder, doesn't fade in a few seconds;
- At night, small and bright flashes at ground level instead of in the clouds. These could be power lines being snapped by a strong wind.

What To Do When A Tornado Is Coming

Listen to your radio for tornado warnings during bad thunderstorms. If a tornado warning is issued, don't panic. Instead, listen and look. Quickly, but calmly, follow the directions for getting to shelter.

If you have time before the tornado strikes, secure objects such as garbage cans and lawn furniture that can injure people. While most tornado damage is a result of the violent winds, most injuries and deaths actually result from flying debris.

Most importantly, you should:

- Take cover. Go to the basement and crouch down under the stairs. Do not take an elevator. If you can't get to a basement, go into a closet or bathroom. Or sit underneath a sturdy piece of furniture on the ground floor near the center of the building.
- Stay away from windows and outside doors.
- If possible, try to position yourself so that you are not below heavy objects (appliances, piano, etc.) on a floor above you. These objects might fall through a weakened floor.
- Use a blanket, sleeping bag or mattress to protect yourself from flying debris. Pull your knees up under you and protect your head with your hands.
- If you're driving, safely park your car and get to a building. If you can't get to a building, get away from the car, lie flat and face down in low ground and stay far from other cars or trees.
- If possible, try to avoid being in a building with a wide-span roof, such as an auditorium, church or hall. These roofs are vulnerable to collapse in a tornado.

Final Word

Tornadoes can occur so quickly there is little time to get to shelter or pack an emergency kit. Protect yourself and your family by planning ahead what you'll do if a tornado strikes.