

Be Prepared for Severe Weather This Summer

April 21st through April 25th is Severe Weather Awareness Week

For more than 25 years, the state of Minnesota has conducted a Severe Weather Awareness Week in partnership with the National Weather Service and local governments. This year Severe Weather Awareness Week will be April 21st - 25th. The following information will help you and your family prepare for tornadoes and severe storms.

Sirens

When these warning sirens sound, they involve two distinct signals. These two different signals warn you of possible threats to your community.

- The first, and most frequently used signal, indicates a tornado or other severe weather. This signal is a steady tone.
- The other signal is for other types of emergencies. It has a warbling sound.

If you hear your sirens sound, and the signal is a steady tone, it means that severe weather has been sighted in your area. Seek shelter immediately and turn on a battery-powered radio for more information. If you see that severe weather is approaching, don't wait for the sirens to go off before seeking shelter. In some fast-moving storms, the dangerous weather may pass through before the siren can be turned on. Stay alert to severe weather!

Tornado Watch

A tornado or severe thunderstorm **watch** means that conditions are favorable for the development of tornadoes or severe thunderstorms. Many tornadoes originate inside severe thunderstorm cells.

When a watch is issued for your area, pay close attention to the weather. Make sure that everyone in your family knows the correct action to take if the weather gets worse. If weather becomes more threatening, or you see an approaching storm, immediately turn

Tornado Warning

A tornado or severe thunderstorm **warning** means a tornado or severe thunderstorm **has been reported or is indicated by weather radar**. Warnings are issued for counties and/or communities. Warning information includes the tornado's location, direction and speed. If the warning is for your area, *you must take shelter immediately*.

Learn the location of designated shelters at work, school, and in other public buildings you frequent. Designate a tornado shelter in your home or building. Be sure all family members know where and when to seek shelter. Make sure to take a battery-powered

What to Do at Home

If you are at home when a tornado or severe thunderstorm warning is issued, take shelter immediately. Go to the basement and seek shelter under the stairs or sturdy furniture. If you do not have a basement, seek shelter in a small room at the lowest level, in the center of the building. Bathrooms and closets are good potential shelters. Avoid rooms with windows.

Manufactured homes are extremely vulnerable to the effects of tornadoes and severe thunderstorms. One third of tornado deaths nationwide occur in manufactured homes. Residents of manufactured home parks should have a shelter in the park or a plan for residents to evacuate to an off-site shelter location. Find out about the tornado shelter plan in your park. If there is no time to get to shelter, abandon the manufactured home

Your Home Shelter

If you live in a traditional northern home with a basement, you have an excellent potential shelter. Take a few minutes to select and prepare a good spot in your basement in case a tornado strikes your community.

When you choose your basement shelter location, take these factors into consideration:

- Your shelter should be large enough to hold all family members.
- Avoid windows, doorways, and stairways. These are all entry areas for flying debris and destructive winds.
- A good shelter location is underneath the basement stairs. Stairways are structurally sound and provide excellent protection against falling debris.
- Another good shelter choice is near any outside wall.
- When space allows, position yourself beneath a piece of sturdy furniture, such as a table or workbench.
- **Pre-stock your shelter** with a battery-powered radio, flashlight, blankets, and a first aid kit.

Make sure all family members know the shelter location. Conduct a family tornado drill to test your plan.

What to Do away from Home

Some basic tornado safety rules apply if a tornado threatens when you are not at home.

- The best tornado shelter in any building is the lowest level.
- Look for pre-designated shelters in buildings you frequent.
- Smaller rooms, such as closets, rest rooms, or storerooms are good shelter areas.
- Position yourself beneath a piece of sturdy furniture.
- Cover your head and chest to protect yourself from flying debris.
- Seek shelter away from doors and windows.

- Long-span roof areas like those in malls and gymnasiums are especially vulnerable to tornadoes. Find a small room.
- **Don't run for your car.** You are safer inside a building than in the open.
- If a tornado strikes while you are in a car; get out of the car immediately and seek shelter in a depression or in a culvert. **Do not try to outrun the tornado.**

Severe Thunderstorms

Thunderstorms also can produce strong wind gusts. These **straight-line winds** have been known to reach 100 miles an hour and produce tornado-like damage. Treat severe thunderstorms just as you would tornadoes. Move to an appropriate shelter if you are in the path of a severe storm.

The strong rush of wind from a thunderstorm is called a **downburst**. One of the primary causes is rain-cooled air. The rain-cooled air accelerates rapidly downward, producing a potentially damaging gust of wind.

Strong downbursts are often mistaken for tornadoes. They are often accompanied by a roaring sound similar to a tornado. Downbursts can easily overturn mobile homes, tear roofs off houses and topple trees.

Lightning

Lightning kills an average of 100 people in the United States each year, and it injures many more. If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to the storm to be struck by lightning. Lightning can strike the ground 10 to 12 miles from the storm that causes it.

The most likely places for people to be killed by lightning are ball fields, golf courses, boats, and tractors without cabs. Do not use metal objects such as fishing rods or golf clubs when lightning is threatening. Stop tractor work, dismount and seek shelter. If you are boating or swimming, get to land and find shelter at least 100 yards from shore.

The steel frame of an enclosed, hardtop car provides increased protection if you are not touching metal. If you are caught outside, don't sit down or lie on the ground — you make a larger target. Crouch low to the ground, with your hands on your knees and your head between them. If you are in a group, stay at least 15 feet apart. Avoid seeking shelter under a lone tree.

A person struck by lightning carries no electrical charge and can safely be handled. A person injured by lightning has received an electric shock and may be burned, both where the strike occurred and where the electricity left the body. If breathing has stopped, begin rescue breathing. If the heart has stopped, a trained person should give CPR. Call 9-1-1 immediately.

If you are inside, avoid talking on a corded telephone or touching electrical appliances that are plugged into the wall. Avoid taking a bath or shower, or running water for any purpose. Lightning that strikes wiring or plumbing can travel on to you.

Flash Flooding

A thunderstorm that produces large amounts of rain in a short time may cause flash floods. Flash flooding is the number one killer associated with thunderstorms; nearly 140 fatalities occur nationally each year. Seventy-five percent of flash flood fatalities occur at night. Half of the victims die in automobiles or other vehicles. Two feet of running water is enough to carry away most vehicles. Many deaths occur when persons purposely drive around barricades indicating that the road is washed out ahead.

In mid-summer, 2006, 8-10 inches of rain fell over Owatonna, Minnesota one late afternoon and evening. Flash flooding from these rains forced the evacuation of a motel filled with more than 75 guests and damaged 18 other homes and businesses in the area.

Family Preparedness

Emergencies such as tornadoes can change lives in an instant. While you cannot prevent tornadoes, thunderstorms and blizzards, you can take action in advance to reduce the impact of these potential disasters. Your chances of survival and recovery increase dramatically if you plan ahead for all types of disasters.