



Disaster

readiness · response · recovery

What to Do Before, During, and After a Tornado

Tornado Watches and Warnings

The National Weather Service issues a tornado watch when tornadoes are likely to develop. If a watch is issued, remind family members where they should go, and listen to the radio or television for further developments.

A tornado warning is issued when a tornado has been sighted or indicated by radar. The danger is very serious and everyone should go to a safe place, turn on a battery-operated radio, and wait for further instructions.

Mobile Homes

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

Tornado Danger Signs

Learn these tornado danger signs:

- Large hail—Tornadoes are spawned from powerful thunderstorms and the most powerful thunderstorms produce large hail. Tornadoes frequently emerge from near the hail-producing portion of the storm.
- Calm before the storm—Before a tornado hits, the wind may die down and the air may become very still.
- Cloud of debris—An approaching cloud of debris can mark the location of a tornado even if a funnel is not visible.



- Funnel cloud—A visible rotating extension of the cloud base is a sign that a tornado may develop. A tornado is evident when one or more of the clouds turns greenish (a phenomenon caused by hail) and a dark funnel descends.
- Roaring noise—The high winds of a tornado can cause a roar that is often compared with the sound of a freight train.
- Calm behind the storm—Tornadoes can occur near the trailing edge of a thunderstorm. It is not uncommon to see clear, sunlit skies behind a tornado.

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

- 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. Have disaster supplies on hand, including the following:
 - 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
 - Cellular phone (if you have one)
- If family members are separated during a tornado (you might be at work and children might be 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. Have a backup “family contact” in case the first one is not available.

During

At home:

- Go at once to the basement, storm cellar, or the 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.
- Go to the center of the room. Stay away from corners because they tend to attract debris.
- Get under a piece of sturdy furniture, such as a workbench or heavy table or desk, and hold on to it.
- Use your arms to protect your head and neck, or use a heavy blanket, pillow, etc., to help protect you and to cover your head.
- If you are in a mobile home, get out and find shelter elsewhere.

At work or school:

- Go to the basement or to an inside hallway at the lowest level.
- 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 your arms to protect your head and neck.

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 your arms to protect your head and neck.

In a car:

- Never try to out-drive a tornado in a car or truck. Tornadoes can change direction quickly and can lift and toss your vehicle through the air.
- Leave 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.

After

- Help injured or trapped persons
- Give first aid when appropriate. Don't move the seriously injured unless they are in immediate danger of further injury. Call for help.
- Turn on radio or television to get the latest 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, bleach, gasoline, or other flammable liquids immediately. Leave the building if you smell gas or chemical fumes.
- Take pictures of damage to the house and its contents for insurance purposes.
- Remember to help neighbors who may require special assistance like people with infants, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

Inspecting Utilities and Buildings

General Advice

- Use great caution when entering a building damaged by high winds. Be sure that walls, ceiling, and roof are in place and that the structure rests firmly on its foundation.
- Look out for broken glass and downed power lines.

Utilities

Check for gas leaks. If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and

quickly leave the building. Turn off the gas at the outside main valve if you can and call the gas company from a neighbor's home. If you turn off the gas for any reason, a professional must turn it back on.

Look for electrical system damage. If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. Do not step in water to get to the fuse box or circuit breaker; call an electrician for advice.

Check for sewage and water line damage. If you think sewage lines are damaged, avoid using toilets and call a plumber. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using tap water.

Buildings

- Check the roof for:
 - Missing or damaged shingles.
 - Loose nails on metal roofing. If nails don't hold when hammered back in, use #12 or #14 metal screws to fill old nail holes.
 - Potential leaks that could indicate structural separation. This is more easily checked for on sunny days.
- Inspect the foundation to make sure that joints where the foundation and wall meet haven't separated. On stone or concrete foundations, check to see that plate bolts are not loose.
- Inspect the interior of buildings for structural damage.
- Using a good light, check the framing. Look for ridge separation, loose knee braces, and loose rafters where the rafters join the walls.