



## Tornado Safety Rules for Schools

All schools should develop plans and conduct drills. School officials need to be especially cautious during hurricane season. Tornadoes often occur on the outer fringes of tropical storms and hurricanes.

School officials who are familiar with precautions to take if a tornado occurs can better safeguard children at their schools.

**Understand Watches and Warnings**—The National Weather Service issues a tornado watch when a tornado is possible, and a tornado warning when a tornado has been spotted or indicated on radar. But there may not be time for a tornado warning before a twister strikes. Tornadoes form suddenly. Teachers and students should know the difference between a watch and a warning.

**Have a Plan**—School officials should have a plan for rapidly informing every school in the system of tornado watches and warnings, either by radio or telephone.

**Know Each Building**—Each school should be inspected and tornado shelter areas should be designated. Schools with basements should use these as shelters; otherwise, use interior hallways on the ground floor. Never use gymnasiums, auditoriums, or other rooms with wide, free-span roofs. Teachers and students should know their designated shelter area.

Children in less sturdy schoolrooms, such as portable or temporary classrooms, should be escorted to sturdier buildings or to chosen ditches, culverts, or ravines, and instructed to lie down, hands over head. Most tornado

deaths are caused by head injuries.

A special alarm system should be designated to indicate a tornado has been sighted and is approaching.

**Have a Bus Policy**—School administrators should establish procedures governing use of school buses during tornado watches and warnings. Generally speaking, school buses should continue to operate during tornado watches but not during tornado warnings. School buses are easily rolled by tornado winds.

**Assign Emergency Roles**—During a tornado watch, specified adults should monitor commercial radio or TV for tornado warnings, even if the school has a NOAA Weather Radio tone-alert system. Weather spotters also should keep an eye on the sky for dark, rolling clouds, hail, driving rain, or a sudden increase in wind, in addition to the telltale funnel. Tornadoes are often obscured by precipitation or darkness. Other public agencies, too, report tornado sightings.

Specified teachers should be assigned to round up children on playgrounds or other outdoor areas during a tornado warning. Otherwise, they might be overlooked.

**Use an Alarm System**—Designate a special alarm system to indicate a tornado has been sighted and is approaching. A backup alarm should be planned for use if electrical power fails perhaps a battery-operated bullhorn, a hand-cranked siren, or even an old-fashioned hand-swung bell.

**Have Emergency Procedures and Conduct Drills**—When children are assembled in school basements or interior hallways during a tornado drill or warning, they should be instructed to respond to a specific command to assume protective postures and to face interior walls when the danger is imminent. Such a command might be: “Everybody down! Crouch on elbows and knees! Hands over back of head!” It is essential that this command be instantly under-

stood and obeyed. Illustrations showing the protective position should be posted on bulletin boards.

If a school bus is caught in the open when a tornado is approaching, the children should be escorted to a nearby ditch or ravine and made to lie face down, hands overhead. They should be far enough away so the bus cannot topple on them. Bus drivers should be regularly drilled in tornado procedures.



Adapted by Cooperative Extension Specialists, NC State University, from University of Florida/ Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences' *Disaster Handbook*