

Tornado Safety Tips and Information

Tornadoes are violent by nature. They are capable of completely destroying well-made structures, uprooting trees and hurling objects through the air like deadly missiles. A tornado is a violently rotating column of air extending from the base of a thunderstorm down to the ground. Tornado intensities are classified on the Fujita Scale with ratings between F0 (weakest) to F5 (strongest). Although severe tornadoes are more common in the Plains States, tornadoes have been reported in every state.

Know the Difference

Tornado Watch - Tornadoes are possible in and near the watch area. Review and discuss your emergency plans, and check supplies and your safe room. Be ready to act quickly if a warning is issued or you suspect a tornado is approaching. Acting early helps to save lives!

Tornado Warning - A tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. Tornado warnings indicate imminent danger to life and property. Go immediately under ground to a basement, storm cellar or an interior room (closet, hallway or bathroom).

How to Prepare for a Tornado

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- During any storm, listen to local news or a [NOAA Weather Radio](#) to stay informed about tornado watches and warnings.
- Know your community's warning system. Communities have different ways of warning residents about tornados, with many having sirens intended for outdoor warning purposes.
- Pick a safe room in your home where household members and pets may gather during a tornado. This should be a basement, storm cellar or an interior room on the lowest floor with no windows.
- Practice periodic tornado drills so that everyone knows what to do if a tornado is approaching.
- Consider having your safe room reinforced. Plans for reinforcing an interior room to provide better protection can be found on the [FEMA](#) web site.
- Prepare for high winds by removing diseased and damaged limbs from trees.
- Move or secure lawn furniture, trash cans, hanging plants or anything else that can be picked up by the wind and become a projectile.
- Watch for tornado danger signs:

-Dark, often greenish clouds – a phenomenon caused by hail

-Wall cloud – an isolated lowering of the base of a thunderstorm

- Cloud of debris
- Large hail
- Funnel cloud – a visible rotating extension of the cloud base
- Roaring noise

During

What to Do During a Tornado

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- The safest place to be is an underground shelter, basement or safe room.
- If no underground shelter or safe room is available, a small, windowless interior room or hallway on the lowest level of a sturdy building is the safest alternative.
- Mobile homes are not safe during tornadoes or other severe winds.
- Do not seek shelter in a hallway or bathroom of a mobile home.
- If you have access to a sturdy shelter or a vehicle, abandon your mobile home immediately.
- Go to the nearest sturdy building or shelter immediately, using your seat belt if driving.
- Do not wait until you see the tornado.

If you are caught outdoors, seek shelter in a basement, shelter or sturdy building. If you cannot quickly walk to a shelter:

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- Immediately get into a vehicle, buckle your seat belt and try to drive to the closest sturdy shelter.
- If flying debris occurs while you are driving, pull over and park. Now you have the following options as a last resort:
 - Stay in the car with the seat belt on. Put your head down below the windows, covering with your hands and a blanket if possible.
 - If you can safely get noticeably lower than the level of the roadway, exit your car and lie in that area, covering your head with your hands.
- Your choice should be driven by your specific circumstances

After

What to Do After a Tornado

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- Continue listening to local news or a NOAA Weather Radio for updated information and instructions.
- If you are away from home, return only when authorities say it is safe to do so.
- Wear long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and sturdy shoes when examining your walls, doors, staircases and windows for damage.
- Watch out for fallen power lines or broken gas lines and report them to the utility company immediately.
- Stay out of damaged buildings.
- Use battery-powered flashlights when examining buildings – do NOT use candles.
- If you smell gas or hear a blowing or hissing noise, open a window and get everyone out of the building quickly and call the gas company or fire department.
- Take pictures of damage, both of the building and its contents, for insurance claims.
- Use the telephone only for emergency calls.
- Keep all of your animals under your direct control.
- Clean up spilled medications, bleaches, gasoline or other flammable liquids that could become a fire hazard.
- Check for injuries. If you are trained, provide first aid to persons in need until emergency responders arrive.

As you rebuild:

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- Strengthen existing garage doors to improve the wind resistance, particularly double-wide garage doors.
- If your home has been significantly damaged and will require rebuilding parts or all of it, consult with your contractor about having a tornado safe room built during the process. A tornado safe room can save lives. Plans for reinforcing an interior room to provide better protection can be found on the [FEMA](#) web site.

Ask a professional to:

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- Look at common connections in wood frame buildings and add anchors, clips and straps that will provide more strength to your home.
- Reinforce masonry walls that provide structural support to your home.
- Secure your chimney. Masonry chimneys that extend more than six feet above the roof or have a width of 40 inches or more should have continuous vertical reinforcing steel placed in the corners to provide greater resistance to wind loads.

- Permanently connect your manufactured home to its foundation to decrease the potential for damage from high winds.

The Red Cross encourages those in tornado-prone areas to use the [Tornado Safety Checklist](#), which provides information on what you can do before, during and after a tornado strikes.

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Let Your Family Know You're Safe

If your community has experienced a disaster, register on the American Red Cross [Safe and Well](#) web site to let your family and friends know you are safe. You may also call 1-866-GET-INFO to register yourself and your family