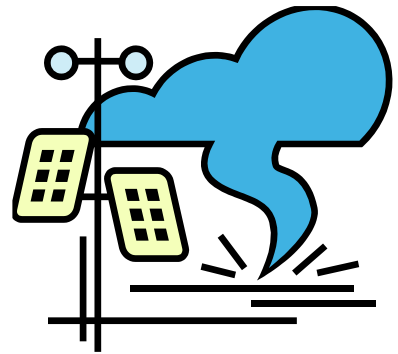




TORNADO SAFETY TIPS



TORNADO SAFETY

What should I do in case of a tornado?

That depends on where you are. This list of tornado safety tips covers most situations.

What is a tornado watch?

A tornado watch defines an area shaped like a parallelogram, where tornadoes and other kinds of severe weather are possible in the next several hours. It does not mean tornadoes are going to happen, just that you need to be alert, and to be prepared to go to safe shelter if tornadoes do happen or a warning is issued. This is the time to turn on local TV or radio, turn on and set the alarm switch on your weather radio, make sure you have ready access to safe shelter, and make your friends and family aware of the potential for tornadoes in the area. The Storm Prediction Center issues tornado and severe thunderstorm watches.

What is a tornado warning?

A tornado warning means that a tornado has been spotted, or that Doppler radar indicates a thunderstorm circulation which can spawn a tornado. When a tornado warning is issued for your town or county, take immediate safety precautions.

Do mobile homes attract tornadoes?

No, It may seem that way, considering most tornado deaths occur in them, and that some of the most graphic reports of tornado damage come from mobile home communities. The reason for this is that mobile homes are, in general, much easier for a tornado to damage and destroy than well-built houses and

office buildings. A brief, relatively weak tornado which may have gone undetected in the wilderness, or misclassified as severe straight-line thunderstorm winds while doing minor damage to sturdy houses, can blow a mobile home apart. Historically, mobile home parks have been reliable indicators, not attractors, of tornadoes.

I heard that you should open windows to equalize pressure. Now I have heard that's a bad thing to do. Which is right?

Opening the windows is absolutely useless, a waste of precious time, and can be very dangerous. Don't do it. You may be injured by flying glass trying to do it. And if the tornado hits your home, it will blast the windows open anyway.

Is it safe to ride out a tornado under a bridge?

Absolutely not! Stopping under a bridge to take shelter from a tornado is a very dangerous idea, for several reasons:

1. Deadly flying debris can still be blasted into the spaces between bridge and grade, and impaled in any people hiding there.
2. Even when strongly gripping the girders (if they exist), people may be blown loose, out from under the bridge and into the open--possibly well up into the tornado itself. Chances for survival are not good if that happens.
3. The bridge itself may fail, peeling apart and creating large flying

objects, or even collapsing down onto people underneath. The structural integrity of many bridges in tornado winds is unknown--even for those which may look sturdy.

4. Whether or not the tornado hits, parking on traffic lanes is illegal and dangerous to yourself and others. It creates a potentially deadly hazard for others, who may plow into your vehicle at full highway speeds in the rain, hail, and/or dust. Also, it can trap people in the storm's path against their will, or block emergency vehicles from saving lives.

On May 3, 1999, two people were killed and several others injured outdoors in Newcastle and Moore OK, when a violent tornado blew them out from under bridges on I-44 and I-35. Another person was killed that night in his truck, which was parked under a bridge.

So if I'm in a car, which is supposed to be very unsafe, and shouldn't get under a bridge, what can I do?

Vehicles are notorious as death traps in tornadoes, because they are easily tossed and destroyed. Either leave the vehicle for sturdy shelter or drive out of the tornado's path. When the traffic is jammed or the tornado is bearing down on you at close range, your only option may be to park safely off the traffic lanes, get out and find a sturdy building for shelter, if possible. If not, lie flat in a low spot, as far from the road as possible to avoid flying vehicles. However, in open country, the best option is to escape if the tornado is far away. If the traffic allows, and the

tornado is distant, you probably have time to drive out of its path. Watch the tornado closely for a few seconds compared to a fixed object in the foreground (such as a tree, pole, or other landmark). If it appears to be moving to your right or left, it is not moving toward you. Still, you should escape at right angles to its track: to your right if it is moving to your left, and vice versa—just to put more distance between you and its path. If the tornado appears to stay in the same place, growing larger or getting closer—but not moving either right or left—it is headed right at you. You must take shelter away from the car or get out of its way fast! If the tornado starts to hit your car, get as low as you can while staying in your seatbelt, leaning down and away from the windows and windshield as far as possible.

I have a basement, and my friend said to go to the southwest corner in a tornado. Is that good?

Not necessarily. The SW corner is no safer than any other part of the basement, because walls, floors and furniture can collapse (or be blown) into any corner. The "safe southwest corner" is an old myth based on the belief that, since tornadoes usually come from the SW, debris will preferentially fall into the NE side of the basement. There are several problems with this concept, including:

1. Tornadoes are not straight-line winds, even on the scale of a house, so the strongest wind may be blowing from any direction; and
2. Tornadoes themselves may arrive from any direction.

In a basement, the safest place is under a sturdy workbench, mattress or other such protection--and out from under heavy furniture or appliances resting on top of the floor above.

What is a safe room?

So-called "safe rooms" are reinforced small rooms built in the interior of a home, fortified by concrete and/or steel to offer extra protection against tornadoes, hurricanes and other severe windstorms. They can be built in a basement, or if no basement is available, on the ground floor. In existing homes, interior bathrooms or closets can be fortified into "safe rooms" also. Those who have safe rooms, or any other kind of tornado shelter, should register them with the local fire department to help with rescue in case the entrance(s) are blocked by debris.

What about community tornado shelters?

Community tornado shelters are excellent ideas for apartment complexes, schools, mobile home parks, factories, office complexes and other facilities where large groups of people live, work or study.

What about tornado safety in sports stadiums or outdoor festivals?

This scenario is a very, very disturbing one to many meteorologists and event planners. Tornadoes have passed close to such gatherings on a few occasions catching people outdoors with hail also being a dangerous hazard. There is the potential for massive death tolls if a stadium or fairground is hit by a tornado during a concert, festival or sporting event, even with a warning in effect. Fans may never know about the warning; and even if they do, mass disorder could result in casualties even if the tornado doesn't hit. Stadium, race track and festival

managers should work with local emergency management officials to develop a plan for tornado emergencies--both for crowd safety during the watch and warning stages, and (similar to a terrorism plan) for dealing with mass casualties after the tornado.

Are there smartphone apps that offer warnings for tornadoes and other kinds of dangerous weather?

Yes, private companies have developed several apps that relay NWS tornado warnings to smartphones, based on their location and/or user-specified places. For example, you can set some apps to always provide warnings for certain ZIP codes or addresses of interest away from your current location, such as those of your home, business, or friends and loved ones. We cannot endorse any particular apps, but a search in your device provider's app store should yield some that are highly rated, along with reviews by users.

Caution: cell-phone warnings cannot work if the phone system is disabled, and might fail or be delayed if the network is overloaded (as can happen during a major storm or other disaster).

