

Tornado Preparedness and Response

STRATEGIES FOR FAMILIES

BE PREPARED

Tornadoes are common in Wisconsin and worth taking seriously. The most violent tornadoes are capable of tremendous destruction with wind speeds of 250 miles per hour or more. Damage paths can be in excess of a mile wide and 50 miles long. 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.

A tornado is defined as a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground. It usually forms when weather is warm, humid and unsettled, and often in conjunction with severe thunderstorms. Direction of movement usually is from the southwest to the northeast, but a tornado's path may be erratic. Likewise, tornadoes tend to occur between 3 and 8 p.m., but they may occur any time.

- ◆ *Conduct tornado drills each tornado season.* Designate an area in your home as a shelter and practice having everyone in the family go there in response to a tornado threat. A basement, storm cellar or lowest level of your home is best. If there is no basement, use an inner hallway or a small inner room without a window, such as a bathroom or a closet.
- ◆ *If you live in a mobile home, plan to take shelter in another building with a strong foundation.* Some mobile home parks provide shelter for residents. If your park does not have a community shelter, consult with the management and request that one be provided.
- ◆ *Know the difference between a “tornado watch” and a “tornado warning.”*
 - a) A tornado watch is issued by the National Weather Service when weather conditions are such that tornadoes are likely to develop. When a watch is announced, you should listen to the radio or television for further developments; keep a battery-powered radio on hand in case electrical power is lost; and tie down loose objects outside or bring them inside.
 - b) A tornado warning is issued when a tornado has been sighted or indicated by radar. At this point, the danger is very serious and everyone should go to a safe place, turn on a battery-operated radio or television and wait for the “all clear” by the authorities.
- ◆ *Have emergency supplies on hand.*
 - a) Flashlights and extra batteries
 - b) Portable battery-operated radio and extra batteries
 - c) First-aid kit and manual; essential medicines
 - d) Emergency food, water, cooking equipment, can opener
 - e) Cash and credit cards
 - f) Sturdy shoes
- ◆ *Develop an emergency communication plan.* In case family members are separated during a disaster because of work or school, choose a long-distance relative or friend to serve as the “family contact.” After a disaster, it is often easier to call long-distance than to make a local call. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address and phone number of the contact person.

AFTER A TORNADO

◆ Gas leaks. If you smell the putrid odor of leaking gas, leave your home immediately and call the gas company. Lanterns, torches, electrical sparks and cigarettes could cause an explosive fire if there is a leak. Do not turn on any light switches.

◆ Electrocution. Check utility lines and appliances for damage. If electrical wiring appears damaged, turn off the current at the main fuse box or circuit breaker.

◆ Structural damage. Watch for falling debris and the possibility of collapse.

◆ Water. If water pipes are damaged, do not use water from the tap; it may be contaminated. Damaged sewage systems should be serviced as soon as possible – they are health hazards.

Additional resources:

Your local emergency government office, the American Red Cross, your county Extension office, the Wisconsin Division of Emergency Government, the Federal Emergency Management Agency

Related publications:

"Tornado Awareness," Wisconsin Division of Emergency Government, 1991.

DURING A TORNADO

If you are at home during a tornado:

- ◆ *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 small inner room without a window, such as a bathroom or a closet.
- ◆ *Get away from 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.*
- ◆ *Use your arms to protect your head and neck.*

If at work or school:

- ◆ *Go to the basement or to an inside hallway at the lowest level.*
- ◆ *Avoid wide rooms such as auditoriums, cafeterias or large hallways.*
- ◆ *Get under a piece of sturdy furniture such as a workbench, heavy table or desk.*
- ◆ *Use your arms to protect your head and neck.*

If 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.*
- ◆ *Use your arms to protect your head and neck.*

If in a car or truck:

- ◆ *Never try to outride a tornado.* Tornadoes can change direction quickly and can lift up a car or truck and toss it through the air.
- ◆ *Get out of the car immediately and take shelter in a nearby building, ditch or low-lying area away from the vehicle.*