

Tornado Season: Are You Ready?

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Each year, many people are killed or seriously injured by severe storms and tornadoes despite advance warning. Some didn't hear the warning, while others received the warning but did not believe a tornado would actually affect them. After you have received the warning or observed threatening skies, you must make the decision to seek shelter before the storm arrives. It could be the most important decision you will ever make.

A tornado is defined as a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground. In an average year, 800 tornadoes are reported nationwide, resulting in 80 deaths and more than 1,500 injuries. Tornadoes can occur anywhere at anytime of the year. In the Midwest states, peak tornado occurrence is in mid-March through late June. Missouri is considered at high risk from tornadoes and is in "tornado alley," which places the state in the top five for tornado activity. Most tornadoes occur between noon and midnight. That's the warmest time of the day, which provides the lift for the formation of severe thunderstorms.

Know what to listen for...

- A "**Tornado Watch**" is issued when tornadoes are possible in your area. Remain alert for approaching storms.
- A "**Tornado Warning**" is issued when a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. Move to your pre-designated place of safety.

The best defense in your home, especially in the overnight hours, is having an National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio for the latest tornado watches and warnings. Stay informed of weather conditions by tuning into local radio and television stations, and take all watches and warnings seriously.

Remember, tornadoes develop in areas where a severe thunderstorm watch or warning is in effect, so listen for that information as well. Remain alert!

Know what you can do ... tornado safety

Before the storm

- Develop a plan for you and your family for home, work, school, and when outdoors.

- Hold frequent drills.
- Purchase an NOAA weather radio for your home.
- Know the county in which you live, and keep a highway map nearby to follow storm movement from weather bulletins.
- Listen to radio and television for information.
- If planning a trip outdoors, listen to the latest forecasts, and take necessary action if threatening weather is possible.
- Know who is at the most risk: people in automobiles; the elderly, very young and physically or mentally disabled; people in manufactured (mobile) homes; or people who may not understand the warning due to a language barrier.

During the storm

- In a home or building, move to a pre-designated shelter, such as a basement.
- If an underground shelter is not available, move to an interior room or hallway on the lowest floor, and get under a sturdy piece of furniture.
- Stay away from windows.
- Get out of automobiles.
- Do not use a highway overpass as shelter.
- Do not try to outrun a tornado in your car; instead, leave it immediately.
- If caught outside or in a vehicle, lie flat in a nearby ditch or depression.
- Manufactured (mobile) homes, even if tied down, offer little protection from tornadoes and should be abandoned.
- Outdoor warning sirens are for individuals outdoors. They are a warning to go to an inside shelter and listen to any Emergency Alert System (EAS) messages for details.

Following these simple steps can save your life and the lives of your loved ones. We see lots of severe weather in Missouri, but we should not become complacent. If you need a reminder of how serious these situations are, please talk to anyone from Pierce City, Stockton, Carl Junction, Canton or Desoto. They have some stories to tell you!

For more information on emergency preparedness, contact your local MU Extension office.

Original author Eric Evans

