

Tornadoes

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Tornadoes

Tornadoes are nature's most violent storms and can leave an area devastated in seconds. A tornado appears as a rotating, funnel shaped cloud, striking the ground with whirling winds of up to 200 miles per hour or more. A tornado spins like a top and may sound like a train or an airplane. Although tornadoes usually travel for up to 10 miles before they subside, 200-mile "tornado tracks" have been reported. Tornadoes can strike any time of the year and often accompany hurricanes. In addition to those measures listed in the General Family Preparedness section, also use the following tornado preparedness and response measures.

How to Prepare for a Tornado

1. Know the tornado season for your area.
2. Learn to recognize severe weather signs. Tornado weather is usually hot and humid with southerly winds.
3. Know what a tornado looks and sounds like.
4. Know what a tornado watch or warning is:

A Tornado **Watch** indicates that weather conditions may cause tornadoes or severe thunderstorms to develop in or near the watch area.

A Tornado **Warning** means that a tornado has actually been sighted or indicated by radar and residents should take shelter.

Special Precautions for Mobile Home Dwellers

1. When you purchase a mobile home, look for built-in safety features:

- Factory installed anchoring straps under the skin of the mobile home

- Steel binding of the mobile home top to the frame

- Covered bottom

2. When selecting a mobile home park, consider the protection it offers your home against the wind.

- Consider lots with solid concrete foundations with steel anchor locations.

- Natural barriers such as older trees or small hills will help shelter your home.

- Locate your home so the small end is directed into the direction of prevailing winds, reducing surface exposure to wind impact.

3. Encourage your neighbors to tie down, too. An unanchored mobile home blown into your home can cause extensive damage.

4. Have your mobile home blocked properly. Open concrete blocks are less expensive but are never good enough.

5. Make sure you purchase approved tie-downs.

6. Skirting your mobile home will help protect underneath the home from moisture and winter weather, as well as reduce soil heaving caused by soil thawing and freezing during winter months. Soil heaving destabilizes the mobile home, requiring retightening of the tie-downs.

7. Be aware of where designated tornado facilities or shelters are.

What to Do During a Tornado Warning

1. When a tornado has been sighted, stay away from windows, doors and outside walls. Protect your head from falling objects or flying debris. Take cover wherever you are.

In a house or small building, go to the storm cellar or basement. If there is no basement, go to an interior part of the structure on the lowest level (closets, interior hallways). In either case, get under something sturdy (such as a heavy table) and stay there until the danger has passed. In a school, nursing home, hospital, factory or shopping center, go to a designated shelter area. Stay away from windows and open spaces.

In a vehicle, trailer or mobile home, get out immediately and go to a more substantial structure.

If there is no shelter nearby, lie flat in the nearest ditch, ravine or culvert with your hands shielding your head.

2. Do not attempt to flee from a tornado in a car or other vehicle.

Responses After a Tornado

1. Use great caution when entering a building damaged by high winds. Be sure that walls, ceiling and roof are in place and that the structure rests firmly on the foundation.
2. Look out for broken glass and downed power lines.

Inspecting Buildings for Hidden Wind Damage

1. Check the roof for:

Missing or damaged shingles.

Loose nails on metal roofing. If nails don't hold when hammered back in, use #12 or #14 metal screws to fill old nail holes.

Potential leaks that could indicate structural separation. This is more easily checked for on sunny days.

2. Inspect the foundation to make sure that joints where the foundation and wall meet haven't separated. On stone or concrete foundations, check to see that plate bolts have not worked loose.

3. Inspect the interior of buildings for structural damage.

Using a good light, check the framing.

Look for ridge separation, loose knee braces and loose rafters where the rafters join the walls.

Special Considerations for Agricultural Producers

In addition to those tornado concerns listed previously, agricultural producers should inspect silos for hidden wind damage.

Make sure the silo is still plumb.

Look for loose hoops.

Inspect the base of metal silos inside and out for hairline cracks.

Remove any rust around the base with a wire brush.

Look for new cracks in the plaster of empty concrete stave silos.

Information in this document was compiled by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service and Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center