

April 2006

Tornado Awareness



In 2005 a record 62 tornadoes were reported in Wisconsin. This includes Wisconsin's all time one day record of 27 twisters on August 18th. What is a tornado? A tornado is a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground. They are considered nature's most violent storms. Tornadoes may appear nearly transparent until dust and debris are picked up or a cloud forms within the funnel. The average tornado moves from southwest to northeast, but tornadoes have been known to move in any direction. The average forward speed is 30 mph but may vary from nearly stationary to 70 mph. The strongest tornadoes have rotating winds of more than 250 mph. Tornado season is generally March through August, although tornadoes can occur at any time of year. They tend to occur in the afternoons and evenings: over 80 percent of all tornadoes strike between noon and midnight.

WHAT TO DO...

❑ In a house with a basement:

Avoid windows. Get in the basement and under some kind of sturdy protection (heavy table or work bench), or cover yourself with a mattress or sleeping bag. Know where very heavy objects rest on the floor above (pianos, refrigerators, waterbeds, etc.) and do not go under them. They may fall down through a weakened floor and crush you.

❑ In a house with no basement, a dorm, or an apartment:

Avoid windows. Go to the lowest floor, small center room (like a bathroom or closet), under a stairwell, or in an interior hallway with no windows. Crouch as low as possible to the floor, facing down; and cover your head with your hands. A bath tub may offer a shell of partial protection. Even in an interior room, you should cover yourself with some sort of thick padding (mattress, blankets, etc.), to protect against falling debris in case the roof and ceiling fail.

❑ In an office building, hospital, nursing home or skyscraper:

Go directly to an enclosed, windowless area in the center of the building -- away from glass. Then, crouch down and cover your head. Interior stairwells are usually good places to take shelter, and if not crowded, allow you to get to a lower level quickly. Stay off the elevators; you could be trapped in them if the power is lost.

❑ In a mobile home:

Get out! Even if your home is tied down, you are probably safer outside, even if the only alternative is to seek shelter out in the open. Most tornadoes can destroy even tied-down mobile homes; and it is best not to play the low odds that yours will make it. If your community has a tornado shelter, go there fast. If there is a sturdy permanent building within easy running distance, seek shelter there. Otherwise, lie flat on low ground away from your home, protecting your head. If possible, use open ground away from trees and cars, which can be blown onto you.

❑ At school:

Follow the drill! Go to the interior hall or room in an orderly way as you are told. Crouch low, head down, and protect the back of your head with your arms. Stay away from windows and large open rooms like gyms and auditoriums.

❑ In a car or truck:

Vehicles are extremely dangerous in a tornado. If the tornado is visible, far away, and the traffic is light, you may be able to drive out of its path by moving at right angles to the tornado. Otherwise, park the car as quickly and safely as possible -- out of the traffic lanes. [It is safer to get the car out of mud later if necessary than to cause a crash.] Get out and seek shelter in a sturdy building. If in the open country, run to low ground away from any cars (which may roll over on you). Lie flat and face-down, protecting the back of your head with your arms. Avoid seeking shelter under bridges, which can create deadly traffic hazards while offering little protection against flying debris.

❑ In the open outdoors:

If possible, seek shelter in a sturdy building. If not, lie flat and face-down on low ground, protecting the back of your head with your arms. Get as far away from trees and cars as you can; they may be blown onto you in a tornado.

❑ In a shopping mall or large store:

Do not panic. Watch for others. Move as quickly as possible to an interior bathroom, storage room or other small enclosed area, away from windows.

❑ In a church or theater:

Do not panic. If possible, move quickly but orderly to an interior bathroom or hallway, away from windows. Crouch face-down and protect your head with your arms. If there is no time to do that, get under the seats or pews, protecting your head with your arms or hands.

Source: National Weather Service



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