

Weather Watch

March came in like a lamb and left the same way. So far, spring has been rather pleasant. April was a bit warmer than usual but we have experienced no severe weather. However, we can expect it at some point. I know there are many people who like storms, my husband included. I'm sure most of you have seen the movie Twister or maybe watched the Storm Chasers. These people are certainly wired differently. I am not one of them!

Severe thunderstorms can be very frightening and tornados are natures most violent and erratic of storms. They can travel for miles along the ground, suddenly change direction, lift and strike again. We have all seen the damage a tornado can cause. Tornados develop in warm, moist air in advance of an eastward-moving cold front. Before thunderstorms develop, a change in wind direction and an increase in wind speed with increasing height, creates an invisible, horizontal spinning effect in the lower atmosphere. Rising air within the thunderstorm updraft tilts the rotating air from horizontal to vertical. An area of rotation, 2-6 miles wide, now extends through much of the storm. A lower cloud base is called a wall cloud. This is the area from which tornados form.

Severe thunderstorms and tornados are categorized by the Fujita-Pearson scale. Severe thunderstorms are an F-0 with wind speed of 40 – 70 mph and can cause damage to chimneys and break tree branches. The following are classes of tornados.

- F-1: 73-112 mph mobile homes pushed off foundations or overturned**
- F-2: 113-157 mph considerable damage mobile homes demolished, trees uprooted**
- F-3: 158-205 mph roofs and walls torn down, trains overturned, cars thrown**
- F-4: 206-260 mph well constructed walls leveled**
- F-5: 261-318 mph Homes lifted off foundation and carried considerable distances, cars thrown as far as 100 meters**

There is little you can do to protect home and property from the strength of tornadic winds; there are actions you can take to better protect yourself and your family. Invest in a weather alert radio and program it to your specific area. Have an emergency kit stocked with at least a flashlight, radio, non perishable foods and bottled water. A more complete emergency supply list can be picked up at the Information Center. Do not ignore severe weather alert sirens. Although there is no guaranteed safe place during a tornado, some locations are safer than others.

***At home:* Get to shelter immediately. Avoid windows. Do not open windows. Houses do not explode and allowing strong wind in can injure and cause damage. The safest place in the home is the interior of the basement, preferably under something sturdy like a table. Stay out from under heavy objects on the floor above. If there is no basement, go to an inside room on the lowest floor, like a hallway, closet or bathroom with no windows. Protect your head with anything available, even hands or arms.**

***Mobile home:* Do not stay in a mobile home during a tornado. Even homes with a secure tie down system cannot withstand the force of tornado winds. Plan ahead. Make arrangements to stay with friends or neighbors who have a basement. Go there when a**

tornado watch is issued. If a warning is issued and the danger is imminent, leave your mobile home immediately and seek shelter nearby. Lie flat in a ditch or ravine and cover your head with your arms. Do not take shelter under your home. Encourage management of your mobile home community to build a tornado shelter.

Long span buildings: These types of buildings are dangerous. The entire roof structure is usually supported solely by the outside walls. Inside walls are usually non-loadbearing. Stay away from windows. Get into a restroom, if possible. Restrooms are usually made of concrete block. In addition to having four walls, the plumbing helps to hold things together. The metal partitions help support falling debris.

On the road: The least desirable place to be in a tornado is in your vehicle. Regardless of size, they can be easily tossed or blown off the road. Do not try to out run a tornado. If you see a tornado, stop your vehicle and get out. Seek shelter in a nearby ditch or ravine. Do not take shelter under the vehicle.

In the open: If caught outside during a severe thunderstorm or tornado and there is no underground shelter immediately available, lie in a ditch or a low spot in the ground. Stay away from trees and water retention basins. Cover you head.

In the aftermath: Make sure everyone is accounted for and check for injuries. Listen to the radio for information about disaster relief. Emergency services are usually on the scene quickly after a tornado. Do not go into a damaged building. It may suddenly collapse. Even if your home appears to be undamaged, check carefully for gas and other utility line breaks. If the lights are out, use a flashlight only. Do not use a match, lighter or any open flame.

Where will your family be in the event of a severe thunderstorm or tornado? They could be anywhere – at work, at school, on a school bus, in a car. How will you find each other? Remember, phone lines may be down, cell towers damaged or overloaded with calls. Develop your disaster plan. Review it often and revise if needed. Keep an emergency supply kit stocked at home and in each car. Planning and preparation is key in managing any emergency situation.

Information on how to become a weather watcher and basic steps to develop a family disaster plan can be found at the Information Center.