

Although this area is typically not known for tornadoes we are adding it to our safety and preparedness section should by some extreme chance one occurs in the Umpqua Valley.

Home Safety Preparedness for Tornadoes

Tornadoes are violent forces of nature in the form of destructive rotating funnels of air. Spawned by thunderstorms, these columns extend downward and can cause major damage to homes and buildings as well as destroy an area's infrastructure within a relatively short period of time. The wind speeds of a tornado vary and can reach as high as 300 mph, leaving behind a trail of destruction up to 50 miles long. The best way to survive a tornado is to properly prepare for one. That means knowing what to do before, during, and after it strikes.

Having a Plan in Place Before the Storm

Being prepared for a tornado means having a well-thought-out plan that the entire family understands and is prepared to follow. While this is crucial for individuals and families living in the region known as Tornado Alley, it is something that people should consider wherever they reside, as tornadoes can occur anywhere, whether it's a farm in Topeka or a piece of Austin real estate. When creating a plan, the safest course of action must be considered and outlined.



What to Do During a Tornado

During a tornado, it's important to know what to do to increase the odds of survival. Creating barriers against debris and projectiles is crucial, which means closing windows and both the exterior and interior doors if possible. Mattresses and padded items are also important, as these items can be used as additional protection from flying debris.

Knowing Where to Go

Getting to the safest location possible should be everyone's main priority. Ideally, go to a storm shelter; however, if that isn't an option, go to the lowest level of the building and toward its center. Stay low, and stop in a location that is farthest away from windows and any heavy objects. A bathroom or closet is a good place to seek shelter. If not at home, people should know where to go if they find themselves in a building that has a wide-span roof, such as an auditorium or a cafeteria, when there is a tornado warning in effect. These types of roofs can easily collapse and are not the safest choice for shelter. Before the threat of a tornado arises, look for nearby buildings that are safer and less likely to collapse. Include this information in your plan, and go there when a tornado is imminent.

The final part of a tornado safety plan should explain how and where to meet after the tornado has passed. People are often desperate to connect with loved ones following a disaster. In the event that cell phones are lost or not working, families should have a primary and secondary designated spot where they can safely meet if their home is destroyed or unreachable.

Preparing a Disaster Kit

Disaster kits are crucial for survival following an emergency. They should contain enough supplies to help everyone living in a household survive for a short period. These items should be kept in a footlocker or a sturdy container. Although it is important to have a kit for the home, ideally, people will also have kits that they can take with them. These items can be put in backpacks or bags for portability.

Home Tornado Kits

For the home, people should add items such as:

Non-perishable food to last up to three days

A three-day supply of water for each person in the home. Everyone should have at least a gallon of water per day.

A three-day supply of food and water for pets

A manual can opener

A first-aid kit that includes medications such as aspirin as well as bandages and prescription medications

Spare batteries

Flashlights

A solar- or battery-powered radio

Tents or tarps

Rope

Spare clothing, including raincoats and sturdy boots or shoes

Spare keys

Credit cards and cash

Flares and light sticks

Whistles

Car Tornado Kits

Cars should have a full tank of gas before a storm in case gas stations are closed. Cars should also always have:

Jumper cables

Reflective triangles

Flashlights

Non-perishable snacks such as energy bars

Bottled water

A shovel

Cat litter for help with traction

Clothing and blankets for warmth

Useful Items to Keep Close

During tornado season, it can be helpful to carry a few useful items at all times. These items include:

A mini flashlight

A cell phone

Extra cash

A pocket knife

A lighter

Know the Signs of a Tornado

In most cases, people have advance warning of impending tornadoes, but people who aren't around a television or radio may have to rely on visual cues to alert them of the threat. Because children spend a good deal of time outdoors, parents should explain to their children what to look for and what to do when they see it. Signs to look for include:

A sky that's dark and greenish in color

Heavy rain or large hail that's followed by intense wind or dead calm

A low-lying wall of cloud that may begin to rotate

A roaring sound like a freight train

Anyone who sees these signs should get indoors and find a radio or television; however, if you see rotating clouds, seek shelter immediately. To ensure that everyone knows what to do in case of a tornado, families should hold practice drills, which will also help everyone react quickly and without becoming overwhelmed by panic.

Tornado Alerts

People who are indoors or near electronic devices can generally expect to be alerted to tornadoes before they arrive. There are two types of alerts: a tornado watch and a tornado warning. A tornado watch is meant to alert residents that a tornado could occur but has not yet formed. When a tornado watch is issued, make sure you're prepared for the worst and stay alert. If there is a tornado warning, that means that a tornado has been seen nearby and is likely approaching. When there is a tornado warning, immediately seek shelter. These alerts are issued through many methods:

Sirens meant to alert a town's residents to get to a radio for further information

The federal Emergency Alert System (EAS)

Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), which are alerts sent by text message

Automated phone calls

Weather radios that pick up broadcasts by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) via the National Weather Service

What to Do When a Tornado Strikes

Not every location is an ideal or safe place to be if there is a tornado. Because some locations may be more dangerous than others, it's important that everyone know what they should do.

In a home that has a basement, go down into it for shelter. Use a helmet or a blanket as protection from debris, and stay clear of windows or potential falling objects. If familiar with the home, do not stop in a location that is beneath a part of the home that has heavy furnishings.

When in a hospital or office building, try to make it to the bottom floor by taking the stairwell. Avoid elevators, which can stop should there be a power outage, and stay clear of windows.

People in mobile homes should leave immediately and head to a more secure building. These types of homes are not a safe place to be when there is a tornado, as they cannot withstand its forces.

When in school, children should follow the lead of their teachers, stay low, and keep their heads protected. If alone, find shelter in a classroom or a school building and stay clear of the gymnasium.

Stores can be crowded, and larger shopping malls may have a lot of windows. Move toward the center of the store or mall, and find a centrally located bathroom or shop if possible.

People who are at the theater or attending church can attempt to take shelter under the rows of seating or pews. If this is not possible, move to a central location and stay clear of all windows and glass.

If driving a car, if it's possible, drive to a sturdy shelter as quickly as possible. If this isn't an option, make a quick decision about whether you can avoid the tornado based on how you see it moving: If it's far off and you can tell which way it's headed, drive at a right angle to where it's going (if it's moving west, for instance, drive north). If the funnel is too close to avoid, stop and quickly exit the vehicle. Run away from the car and find a ditch or other deep impression in the ground to lay down in, then remain in the ditch until the storm ends, staying as flat as possible and protecting your head with your hands and arms. If none of these measures are possible, make sure your seat belt is fastened, duck down below the level of the vehicle's windows, and cover your head with a blanket. Do not take shelter under overpasses.

The water is a dangerous place to be when there is an approaching tornado, as tornadoes get stronger on water. Get to land as quickly as possible, and then seek shelter in the interior of a building.

People living in an apartment should go to the property's storm shelter if one exists. If a storm shelter is not an option, move to the lowest level and head for a central location that has no windows, just as you would in a house. Crouch low and protect your head from injury until the storm passes.

After the Tornado

After the tornado has come and gone, don't assume that the risk has passed. Proceed with caution to ensure that everyone stays safe.

Tornadoes can come back suddenly. Before heading outside, wait for the signal that all is clear.

Use a battery-operated radio to listen for instructions from local officials.

Don't expect the weather to clear up just because the tornado has passed; hail and lightning storms may persist.

Flooding is another disaster situation that may follow on the heels of a tornado. Avoid stepping or wading through water, as it may be deeper than it looks.

Avoid using candles, as there may be gas leaks in the home or surrounding area. Instead, use your flashlight when additional illumination is needed.

Look around for signs that the house or building is not safe. If there's any reason to question the safety of a location, relocate to a safe place and wait for local authorities to deem it safe to return.

Be aware of downed power lines, sharp debris, spilled gas or chemicals, or other hazards. People should not attempt to touch or repair anything that could cause harm. Instead, wait for emergency services to arrive.

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