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Severe Weather Safety Tips

Thunderstorms, Winds and Hail

- The National Weather service considers a thunderstorm to be severe if it produces hail 3/4 inch or larger, wind 58 mph or stronger, or tornadoes.
- **Watches** are issued when conditions are favorable for tornadoes, severe thunderstorms or flash floods. If you are in a watch area, make plans to seek shelter if necessary.
- **Warnings** are issued when severe weather has been reported or is imminent. Seek shelter immediately if you are in or near the path of the storm.
- Warnings are issued by county names. Know the name of the county you live in and the counties that surround you.
- Sirens are meant to warn those who are outdoors. If you hear a siren, turn on a radio or TV to hear safety information and seek shelter immediately.
- Thunderstorms can produce a strong out rush of wind known as a downburst or straight-line winds, which may exceed 120 mph. They can overturn mobile homes, tear roofs off houses and topple trees.
- Hail annually causes nearly one billion dollars in damage nationally. Large hailstones fall at speeds faster than 100 mph and have been known to kill people.

Lightning

- Lightning kills around 100 Americans annually, with about 300 others injured.
- Lightning may occur even when it is not raining and miles away from any storm activity.
- Rubber tires on a vehicle will not protect you from being injured by lightning.
- When Inside:
 - Avoid using the phone (except for emergencies) or other electrical appliances.
 - Do not take a bath or shower
 - It is recommended that all electrical appliances should be on GFI breakers or surge protectors.
- If caught outdoors:
 - Go to a safe shelter immediately! Such as inside a sturdy building.
 - If you are boating or swimming, get out of the water immediately and move to a safe shelter away from the water.
 - If you are in a wooded area, seek shelter under a thick growth of relatively small trees.

- Avoid isolated trees or other tall objects, bodies of water, sheds, fences, convertible automobiles, tractors and motorcycles.

Tornadoes

- **Tornado watch:** Atmospheric conditions are favorable for severe thunderstorms to produce tornadoes. Listen for updated forecasts and possible warnings.
- **Tornado warning:** A tornado has been spotted on the ground or is indicated by radar. Take cover immediately!

The National Weather Service issues warnings. If a tornado approaches your area, forecasters are able to track the storm using advanced weather radar. Trained storm spotters and local officials report tornadoes on the ground to the NWS office. The NWS will issue a tornado warning if either of these indicates a tornado.

NOTE: Although rare, warnings for tornados may be issued even when a tornado watch is not in effect.

- **Tornado preparation and safety tips:**
Since tornadoes often strike with little or no warning, you need to be prepared before a severe storm strikes. Several life saving steps should be taken to prepare your family before a tornado threatens your safety. As tornado season approaches, you and your family should design a tornado plan and designate a safety shelter. Once the plan is designed, several practice drills should be done.
- **Before the tornado**
Knowing that your area is prone to tornadoes is the first step in becoming prepared for one.
The key to being safe is to have a plan. Knowing what you will do when a tornado is approaching will help you get out of harms way, fast.
Some steps to prepare for a tornado can take place any day of the year; these include:
 - Planning what you would do in the event a tornado watch or warning is issued.
 - Purchase a weather radio
 - Designate a tornado shelter and route to it
- **During the tornado warning**
If you hear your sirens go off, and the signal is a steady pitch, it means severe weather has been sighted near you. Seek shelter immediately and turn on a battery-powered radio for more information. If severe weather is in your area, don't wait for the sirens to go off before seeking shelter. In some fast-moving storms, the danger may pass through before the siren can be turned on. Stay alert to severe weather!
- **During the tornado**
As the tornado warning is issued— take shelter and stay there until the storm passes. No All Clear is given
If a tornado warning is issued for your location, take the following steps immediately. These steps should also be practiced during your tornado drills.
- **In the house**
 - Go at once to the basement, storm cellar, or the lowest level of the building.

- If there is no basement, go to an inner hallway or a smaller inner room without windows, such as a bathroom or closet.
- Get away from the windows.
- Go to the center of the room. Stay away from corners because they tend to attract debris.
- Get under a piece of sturdy furniture such as a workbench or heavy table or desk and hold on to it.
- Use arms to protect head and neck.
- *Stay Away From Windows.*

The designated tornado shelter should always be stocked with the following disaster supplies:

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio with weather band and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water
- Non-electric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes

Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency

- **After the tornado**

- The aftermath of a tornado can be devastating, but knowing what to do after a tornado strikes will make the recovery effort easier, quicker and safer.
- Listen to local officials and emergency management personnel.
- Stay away from downed power lines and other harmful debris.
- Remain calm, especially around children.
- Check on the elderly and your pets.
- Use a flashlight and not candles to inspect damage.
- Check for any gas leaks and turn the valves off if there's a leak
- Turn off electricity if there are signs of sparks.
- Watch for any loose debris that could fall.
- Take pictures of your damaged property for insurance claims.

- ***In an apartment, school or office building***

- Move to the innermost room on the lowest level or to a pre-designated shelter area.
- Crouch down and protect your head from flying debris. Avoid areas with glass and large roof spans.

- ***In a mobile home or a vehicle***

- Abandon it immediately. Seek a sturdy shelter or permanent structure. If there is no time, get out and lie flat in the nearest ditch or depression with your hands shielding your head.

- ***What to do when you are away from home***

Some basic tornado safety rules apply if a tornado threatens and you are not at home.

- The best tornado shelter in any building is the lowest level.

- Look for pre-designated shelters in buildings.
- Other good locations in buildings are smaller rooms, such as closets, rest rooms, or storerooms.
- Get underneath a sturdy piece of furniture.
- Cover your head and chest to protect yourself from flying debris.
- Seek shelter **away** from doors and windows.
- Long-span roof areas like those in malls and gymnasiums are especially vulnerable to tornados.
- *Don't run for your car.* You are generally safer inside a building than in the open.
- If a tornado strikes while you're in a car, immediately stop the car and seek shelter in a depression, under a bridge, or in a culvert. **Do not try to outrun the tornado.**

Flash Floods

- Nationally, floods claim nearly 200 lives annually, force 300,000 persons from their homes, and cause property damage in excess of 2 billion dollars.
- They can develop quickly and occur anywhere, or anytime without warning, and can be deceptive in depth and speed
- When driving, do not cross through water. One to two feet of running water is enough to carry away most vehicles. Fifty percent of flash flood deaths occur in vehicles. Rising waters can make opening of car doors difficult if not impossible. Leave your vehicle immediately if your vehicle stalls in floodwater and head to higher ground.
- Everyone, especially children, should stay away from flooded creeks, streams or drainage ditches
- Swiftly flowing water can quickly sweep away even the strongest swimmers, even in shallow depths
- Soggy banks can collapse, dumping you into floodwaters.