

Tornado Awareness



Tornadoes are relatively short-lived local storms. They are composed of violently rotating columns of air that descend in the familiar funnel shape from thunderstorm cloud systems. The weather conditions that tend to generate tornadoes are unseasonably warm and humid earth surface air, cold air at middle atmospheric levels, and strong upper-level jet stream winds. Tornadoes can occur anywhere in the United States during any month of the year. However, the Great Plains and Gulf Coast States experience the largest number of tornadoes. The greatest frequency of tornadoes occur in April, May and June.

The destructive path of a tornado averages about 250 yards in width and 15 miles in length. In extreme conditions, a tornado may travel more than 300 miles and leave a path of total destruction more than a mile wide. Tornadoes will travel up to 60 mph, with wind speeds approaching 400 mph within the tornado's center.

Signs and Warnings

Tornadoes develop during severe thunderstorms. While not all thunderstorms create tornadoes, the potential is there. During violent weather, keep tuned to local television or radio station for tornado reports.

If you are outside and see a funnel-shaped cloud with obvious rotating motion, it may be a tornado. As a tornado develops, it will produce a loud roar that grows louder as the funnel cloud touches the ground. When nearby, a tornado has a loud sound comparable to the combined roars of several jet engines.

The National Severe Storms Forecast Center in Kansas City, Missouri issues tornado watches. Local National Weather Service offices issue tornado warnings. Local officials may sound sirens in a tornado warning.

A tornado watch indicates that conditions are right for a tornado to develop and the sky should be watched.

A tornado warning indicates a tornado has been sighted or is spotted on radar. Warnings will give the location of the tornado and the area immediately affected by the warning.

Immediate Dangers

The immediate threat from tornadoes is danger to life and damage to property from violently whirling winds and debris hurled through the air by winds.

Long Term Dangers

Long-term risks include the possibility of building collapse, fallen trees and power lines, broken gas lines, broken sewer and water mains, and the outbreak of fires. Agricultural crops and industries may be damaged or destroyed.

Preparedness

The best preparation for a tornado is to designate a safe place in or around your home as a tornado shelter. Tornado shelters are safest if they are underground. A storm cellar or basement away from windows offers the best protection.