

Weather Safety Tips

Severe weather conditions such as extreme heat, thunderstorms and lightning, tornadoes, and floods affect hundreds of residents every year. Such natural disasters can devastate our community and alter lives forever, all within a matter of minutes. It is important to recognize the risks from natural hazards and take sensible precautions to protect ourselves, our families, and our community.

Tornadoes

Tornadoes are one of nature's most violent storms. They may strike quickly with little or no warning. Stay tuned to radio or TV for weather updates.

The National Weather Service (NWS) encourages radio and TV stations to use the following terms to communicate storm conditions:

- **Tornado Watch** means that tornadoes are possible. Watch the sky and stay tuned to broadcasts for information.
- **Tornado Warning** is issued when a tornado funnel has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. Take shelter when you hear a Tornado Warning for your area.

Warning Sirens

Most cities operate outdoor storm warning sirens. Whenever severe weather approaches, the city dispatches storm spotters to key locations in the city to watch for tornadoes and potentially dangerous storms. Emergency Service personnel monitor national weather service reports, local TV broadcasts and radar. When dangerous storms are imminent, emergency sirens are activated in all parts of the city. When you hear a siren, prepare to take shelter immediately. If caught outside, or on the road, lie in a ditch or low area. Avoid bridges or overpasses. Don't try to outrun a tornado.

Storm sirens are designed to warn citizens who are outdoors to take cover. Some residents may not be able to clearly hear the sirens indoors. Do not depend solely on these sirens to alert you of approaching severe weather. Do not call 911 to ask why the sirens have been activated. When there is a chance for severe weather, tune your TV or radio to a local station to stay informed on recent developments and predictions.

For even more information you can purchase a NOAA weather radio for your home or business which will broadcast an alert when severe weather approaches.

What to do

If a tornado or storm system with high winds approaches:

IF AT HOME, WORK OR SCHOOL:

- go to a basement or an interior hallway on the ground floor, or a small inner room such as a bathroom or closet.
- Stay away from the windows and outside walls of the building.
- Avoid spaces with wide-span roofs such as family great rooms, auditoriums, cafeterias, or shopping malls.
- Get under a sturdy piece of furniture such as a heavy table or desk and hold onto it.
- If in a mobile home, get out and seek shelter elsewhere.

IF OUTDOORS OR IN A CAR:

Never try to escape a tornado in a car or truck. Exit the vehicle immediately and take shelter in a nearby building if possible. If shelter is unavailable, lie in the nearest depression, ditch, culvert or ravine, or crouch near a strong building. Use arms to protect your head and neck.

Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance - infants, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

Thunderstorms and Lightning

A **severe thunderstorm watch** is issued by the NWS when weather conditions are such that a severe thunderstorm is likely to develop

A **severe thunderstorm warning** is issued when a severe thunderstorm has been sighted or indicated by weather radar.

All thunderstorms are dangerous and every thunderstorm is capable of producing lightning strikes as far as 10 miles away from rainfall. Some thunderstorms can be seen approaching, while others hit without warning. A thunderstorm is the result of combined moisture and rapidly rising warm air. Thunderstorms may occur singly, in clusters, or in lines. Lightning is an electrical discharge resulting from the buildup of positive and negative charges within a thunderstorm. Lightning appears as a bolt and the resulting flash of light usually occurs between the clouds and the ground.

It is important to learn and recognize danger signs and to plan ahead. If the probability of a severe storm is present follow these guidelines:

- Take shelter inside a home, building or hardtop vehicle
- Postpone outdoor activities
- Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage
- Close window blinds, shades or curtains and secure outside doors
- Unplug electrical equipment, such as computers, TV's and air conditioners, to avoid damage from lightning spikes
- Be prepared for storm-caused power outages with flashlights and fresh batteries
- Use a battery-operated radio for weather updates

Flood

Flash floods occasionally follow thunderstorms in this area and are one of the most common and widespread of all natural disasters. Be especially aware of flood hazards if you live in a low-lying area. Even very small streams, creeks and streets can be dangerous in a flash flood as they carry rocks and debris in the very powerful water surge.

There are terms to identify a flood hazard that you should know:

1. A **flood WATCH** means that flooding is possible. Tune to NOAA Weather Radio, local radio, or television broadcasts for information.
2. A **flash flood WATCH** indicates that flash flooding is possible. Be prepared to move to higher ground.
3. A **flood WARNING** is issued when flooding is occurring or will occur soon. If advised to evacuate, do so immediately.
4. A **flash flood WARNING** is evidence of a flash flood in progress. Seek higher ground on foot immediately.

- Listen to radio or TV reports about flooding in your area
- Be prepared to move to higher ground should flood waters begin to rise
- Secure your home and move essential items to an upper floor.
- Turn off utilities at the main switch. Do not touch electrical equipment or wires if you are wet or standing in water
- Do not walk through moving water. Only six inches of moving water can cause you to fall
- Do not drive on flooded streets. There may be hidden low spots that can cause your vehicle to stall or even be washed into a swollen stream. If your car stalls, abandon it quickly, if it is possible, to safely reach higher ground
- Do not drive around or through barricades or past stalled vehicles
- If floodwaters rise around your car, abandon the car and move to higher ground if you can do so safely.

Storm-damaged Trees Can Be Dangerous

The aftermath of many Texas storms involves cleaning up branches and downed trees. Texas Forest Service reminds homeowners to be careful with damaged trees. Trunks and branches are heavy and should be considered dangerous until they can be brought to the ground. Even limbs as small as two inches can cause injury if they fall on someone.

Watch for downed power lines. Assume any line is hot until proven otherwise. Beware of broken glass.

"It is a common occurrence to have people survive storms and natural disasters only to be injured while cleaning up afterwards," said John Giedraitis, state urban forest coordinator. "We want people to be as safe as possible while dealing with damaged and fallen trees."

Take caution when pruning small branches and leave the heavy chainsaw work to professionals. Look up for broken limbs that may fall, and look down to avoid fallen power lines. Any damage to limbs within 10 ft. of power lines needs the work of a professional arborist. They have the equipment and knowledge needed, and are usually listed in the telephone book under "Tree Service." Ask for certification through the International Society of Arboriculture.

Be cautious of tree services soliciting door to door. A qualified arborist should have Workers' Compensation insurance, liability insurance and experience in the tree care industry. If their services include tree topping, beware. Tree topping is the worst treatment for trees because it reduces the amount of leaves the tree needs to recover from the storm on its own.

Check with your city or county officials to see if they are providing assistance with disposal of tree debris from private property.

Extreme Heat

Follow these guidelines when the weather is extremely hot:

- Stay indoors when possible and keep sun exposure to a minimum.
- If air conditioning is unavailable, stay on the lowest floor out of the sun.
- Consider spending the warmest part of the day in public buildings such as libraries, shopping malls or community facilities.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Limit alcoholic beverage consumption.
- Dress in loose-fitting, lightweight clothing.
- Check on family, friends, and neighbors who spend time alone.
- NEVER leave children or pets alone in closed vehicles even for a minute.
- Avoid strenuous work during the warmest part of the day.

Texas summers are notoriously hot. Some of the warmest sustained high temperatures on record occur here at home every year. There are terms to identify an extreme heat hazard that you should know:

- A heat wave is a prolonged period of excess heat, combined with excessive humidity.
- The heat index is a calculation in degrees Fahrenheit (F) to tell how hot it feels when relative humidity is added to air temperature.
- Heat cramps occur when muscles ache and spasm due to heavy exertion and are often the first sign the body is in heat distress.
- Heat exhaustion typically occurs when people work or exercise heavily in hot, humid conditions resulting in body fluid loss through heavy sweating and mild shock.
- A life-threatening condition, heat stroke or sun stroke occurs when the body's temperature control system fails. Brain damage and death may result if body temperatures are not cooled.
- Conditions that can induce heat-related illnesses include stagnant atmosphere conditions and poor air quality.

Stay Alert • Take Care • Always Be Safe