

Preparing for a Tornado.

Where will you and members of your family be when a tornado strikes? Statistics show that most occur in the afternoon and evening (3 to 9 PM). Consequently, you should focus on being prepared at work, at school, at the mall, and in your car as well as at home. How can you prepare?

I. Questions to answer and things to do in the days before the storm hits.

1. Important papers etc - what documents will you be searching for when they are all blown away? [Wills, ownership certificates, insurance policies, bank records, investment information, birth certificates, etc] Where do you keep your spare keys and extra cash where it will not be blown away or covered up?
2. Documentation – e.g. serial numbers to prove ownership and replacement costs
 - A. Have you made a video of the contents of your home going room to room and the exterior? Store the tiny digital cassette in a safe deposit box, not at the house.
 - B. Do you have a cheap film camera with flash that you can use to document the condition of your property immediately after the storm?
 - C. Do you have digital copies stored someplace safe of all those irreplaceable, treasured photos?
3. Where is the switch, wrench or tool needed to turn off the gas, water, and electricity? Will your tool box be buried under a pile of rubble? Attach the tool or an adjustable wrench near the valve. Do all family members know how to turn it off if you are not there?
4. Do you have REAL first aid kits at home and in your car to treat multiple trauma patients? Use hydrogen peroxide to clean wounds and feminine sanitary napkin pads and duct tape to bind them.
5. Do you have sheets of plastic or plastic tarps to cover the missing shingles or the gaps where the roof used to be? Where will the nails and a hammer be when you need them to tack the plastic in place while the rain from the squall line continues to soak the interior of your damaged house well after the tornado?
6. Do you have a gasoline powered chain saw that you can use to clear downed trees off of people and property? How long will the chain last when you are using it in rescue or clearing work? Can you sharpen it? Do you have spares?
7. Do you have the means (and training) to protect your family and property from looters? From wild dogs?
8. Do you have spare batteries for all you LED flashlights? What about batteries for your portable radio to monitor TV audio (also on AM frequencies) as the storm approaches? Deep cycle battery for the HF rig?
9. Do you have a weather radio w/ an alarm function in case you are sound asleep when the storm hits? The siren system is NOT designed to awaken you from a deep sleep; it is for people who are outside.
10. Do you have water to drink for several days in case the water supply is contaminated? (One gallon per person per day.) Do you have food for 72 hours? Order MREs on line or get dehydrated food at WalMart.
11. Will you have a supply of dry toilet paper after the storm passes? Put it in sandwich bags or an old plastic peanut butter jar and store it in your trunk or your designated shelter area.

12. With all the roof damage and junk in the streets, do you have a way of fixing your own flats? Do you have an old fashioned tire pump (while on the road) to use when there is no electricity?
13. Do you have a supply of stout rubber gloves you can wear under regular leather gloves to protect yourself from junk and debris contaminated by sewage and dead animal parts?
14. Is your radio gear (and critical water and food) organized in a 72 hour pack? What good will it do you to have it stored at home if you are at work or in your car when the storm hits?
15. When your cell phone dies with its phone directory, do you have important numbers written down somewhere? [Emergency (police and fire), paramedics, and medical centers; names, addresses, and telephone numbers of your insurance agents, including policy types and numbers; telephone numbers of the electric, gas, and water companies; names and telephone numbers of neighbors; year, model, license, and identification numbers of your vehicles (automobiles, boats, and Rvs); bank's or credit union's telephone number, and your account numbers, etc]
16. Do you and members of your family know CPR and first aid for traumatic injuries?
17. Will you have continuous access to medication and important medical information (for example, allergies, regular medications, and brief medical history) after the storm?
18. Can you retrofit a closet or bathroom as a shelter? (I.e., bottom plates bolted to slab; bricks in voids within stud walls; multiple layers of 3/4 inch plywood nailed to studs under drywall; sheet steel and multiple plywood layers in ceiling; all connected securely in accord with FEMA / Texas Tech plans).
19. Do you have time to have diseased trees removed? Can you cut out dead branches that might fall on your house?

II. Things to do when there is a tornado watch (conditions are ideal) or the storm is hours away.

1. Move “stuff” in the garage so you can get your vehicles inside away from hail and flying junk.
2. Place lawn furniture, grills, and toys inside - even straight line winds can damage it and there will be enough stuff flying around without adding to the chaos.
3. Fill gas tanks – gas tankers may not be able to get past downed trees; or pumps may be without power.
4. Move critical supplies to your shelter area, including food, water, blankets, pillows, and padding.
5. Turn on NOAA weather radio; adjust computer for continuous weather radar loop; monitor TV weather, Storm watcher UHF nets, local UHF repeater, and ARES HF net.
6. Dress appropriately for relief work: protect yourself from further danger by putting on long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, sturdy shoes and work gloves (with rubber glove liners).

III. Things to do during a tornado warning (tornado present) and when the storm approaches.

1. Do not wait on the sirens – that may be too late for a storm moving at 65 mph. Remember that tornadoes may be translucent or nearly invisible until they pick up dirt and debris.

2. Experts agree that people in cars are the most vulnerable. Your car is THE MOST dangerous place to be when the storm hits. (Statistically even MORE dangerous than a mobile home!).
 - A. You cannot outdrive a tornado in a traffic jam. You cannot outdrive a rain wrapped tornado you cannot see. You may not be able to outdrive a tornado on a crooked road. The most recent storms in Arkansas moved at 65 mph. The winds of even a small tornado are strong enough to flip your car – and it is not designed like a NASCAR.
 - B. Avoid overpasses – they channelize and increase the winds; get in a building, ditch or culvert.
3. Where is the safest place to be at home? At your office? At your school? At your store at the mall?
 - A. Get in a shelter, basement, closet or bathroom (in the tub) and put as many walls as possible between you and the exterior;
 - B. Avoid large spans; get away from windows, get under a sturdy table; crouch face down on your knees, protect your head and neck, and cover yourself with padding.
 - C. Wear a motorcycle helmet and flak jacket if you have them.
4. Forget about that priceless (?) video view of the storm - flying junk falling from above can kill you.

IV. Things to do and think about and do after the storm.

1. Account for people and their condition. Render aid in your immediate area.
 - A. Do you have a rally point to get to so that you can check on everyone at work or at home?
 - B. How can you be most useful to your family and others? Check on widows and the elderly.
2. Stay away from downed power lines; be aware of gas leaks near houses. Report them if possible.
3. Your cell phone probably will be worthless.
 - A. The system will be jammed (it can only handle 5% of the subscribers at the same time); your battery is now dead; or, your phone is lying in a ditch across town.
 - B. How do you contact your family members at work or at school or somewhere else in town? Pick a place to meet away from your neighborhood in case you cannot return home or establish contact.
 - C. Choose an out-of-state friend as your "family check-in contact" for everyone to call if the family gets separated and cannot find each other locally.
4. Use your UHF radios to stay informed and, if necessary, to assist authorities with emergency communications. As the emergency abates, use your HF radios to pass OUTBOUND health and welfare traffic to let folks outside the damage area know their loved ones are ok.
5. Without electricity, how will you pump gas? Get money from the ATM? Without gas, how will you cook?
6. How long will the food in your refrigerator last without electricity?
7. How can you protect the interior of your home from mold and mildew once it has been soaked?
8. Do not turn gas, electricity, or water back on yourself. Make sure these systems are safe and the water supply is uncontaminated.