



Family Protection  
ASSOCIATION

# TORNADO

SURVIVAL SKILLS

A circular badge with a green-to-yellow gradient background and a white border. The text 'SPECIAL REPORT' is written in white, bold, uppercase letters, slanted upwards. The badge is positioned in the bottom right corner of the page, overlapping the stormy sky and the green field.

SPECIAL  
REPORT

# TORNADO SURVIVAL SKILLS



**F**or most of us, March is a month to look forward to. The first signs of spring have started to appear, the air is fresh and the weather is finally pleasant once again. While most are excited to ditch the winter coat for the next few months, that excitement is equally matched by trepidation in tornado prone areas. March, after all, is the start of tornado season.

Tornadoes are a force of nature, dangerous natural events that are far more destructive than the “cutesy” tornado antics we loved watching when Tasmanian Devil ran rampant in the Looney Tunes. Tornadoes cause millions of damage in property, creating swirling winds that reach as high as 300 mph. As such, people die every year from tornado disasters.

So, the next time you hear a tornado siren blare loudly in your city or town, be sure that you are ready to leap to action. One of the worst mistakes you can make is thinking that tornadoes don’t affect you, simply due to the fact that you don’t live in the tornado-stricken Midwestern areas, commonly called Tornado Alley.

Tornadoes can reach as far as New York, and it is not unheard of for New York City itself to experience tornadoes. No matter where you live, tornado survival skills are essential when an unexpected tornado disaster strikes. This guide provides you with all the essential details you need to get through the next tornado you encounter.

## **PREPARATION IS KEY \***

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Disaster preparedness is always a first line of defense against natural weather disasters like tornadoes, so be sure that you are ready for a tornado if it hits. This advice is particularly essential if you live in areas that are hit by tornadoes every year. First, be aware that strong tornadoes have the capability of knocking out your power and electricity for a few days. Counteract this possibility by preparing for it by procuring supplies that will last until your utilities are restored. You will probably want more supplies than a 72-hour emergency kit can offer, but these are a great starting point to ensure you are prepared.

Additionally, if you have a family, take the time

## STAY ALERT & WATCH FOR WARNING SIGNS



to educate everyone on where you will be taking shelter in the event of an impending tornado. You will also want to purchase some padding materials that can be used as a buffer in your designated shelter room. This will give you an added layer of defense between you and the tornado.

If you are not at home when a tornado strikes, you will have to prepare in an impromptu fashion. This entails having good situational awareness so you can quickly scan an area to find shelter or a bathroom that might be available for safety purposes. If you live in a community setting, such as a trailer park or apartment community, be sure to educate yourself on the evacuation drills. You will have informational resources available to you that instruct you on the proper safety protocols when a tornado is coming.

One of the most common misconceptions people hold about tornadoes is that they will have plenty of time to prepare and get to safety. After all, they reason, there will probably be terrible weather or thunderstorms that alert us to an impending tornado in the area. While this is certainly true some of the time, tornadoes can and do occur at any time of day, and they often come with very little in the way of warnings. Tornado signs can be especially difficult to discern in the evening hours if there are clouds or rain masking those signs. As such, don't make the mistake of thinking a tornado can't come if there isn't a thunderstorm or clear tornado signs in your immediate vicinity. That is the type of thinking that will get you caught "with your pants down", so to speak, so stay vigilant and watch for tornado signs.

Despite the advice that you should never assume a tornado isn't coming because you don't see signs of a tornado, there are certain things you can look for to alert you of a tornado. These signs are particularly helpful, due to the fact that the majority of tornados do occur in the afternoon hours. Some telltale tornado signs include low and dark clouds, wall clouds and a green sky.

If a tornado is fast approaching, the NOAA Storm



Prediction Center informs us that there are key signs we can look for to help us determine whether a tornado is nearing. If there is a cloud base, look for whirling dust or debris on the ground directly beneath the cloud base. As surprising as it seems, tornadoes can exist without the typical funnel that we associate them with having. Also, look for strong, steady rotation in the cloud base itself for another sign that a tornado could be imminent. Other things to look for include:

- Hail and/or heavy rain that is followed by complete calm or fast wind shifts. Tornadoes within heavy precipitation are often invisible to our eyes.
- A loud and continuous rumble that lasts far longer than thunder would.
- In the evening, look for bluish-green or white bright flashes at ground level in a thunderstorm. This suggests power lines are snapping, which is often due to the wind effects of tornadoes.
- If the cloud base is lowering while being illuminated by lightning, this could suggest an imminent tornado.

Knowing all of these warning signs will give you the necessary time to get to your shelters and safety resources in the event of a tornado.

Knowing your tornado terms and warnings is just as important as knowing the warning signs of a tornado. The difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning plays a large role in how you prepare for a tornado.

A tornado watch simply means that there are tornado-friendly conditions present that increase the likelihood of tornadoes. Usually, a tornado watch lasts for only a few hours. A tornado watch does not mean that a tornado is looming, but it is a reminder that you should be aware of a potential tornado as you go about your daily activities.

By contrast, a tornado warning means that a tornado has actually been seen and located. It can either mean that the tornado is descending from the clouds, already on the ground or that meteorologists saw circulation in the storm patterns thanks to their Doppler radar. In many cities, particularly those in Tornado Alley, sirens ring out once a tornado warning is in effect. If your city does not have tornado sirens, it is absolutely imperative that you take the initiative

to stay on top of the latest weather forecasts.

Beyond that, it can be helpful to download weather or tornado warning apps from organizations like the American Red Cross or the Weather Channel. These apps will help alert you if a tornado warning is in effect. In the event that your town or an app alerts you to a tornado warning, there are several precautionary steps that you ought to take. In the event that a tornado warning is in effect, professionals recommend that you ought to seek the best and closest shelter immediately. Preferably, you will be in your own home at the time of the warning. If so, it is often advisable to quickly turn on your radio or television to get the latest information on the tornado. Usually, you will learn important information about the scope of the danger as well as the tornado's current path of movement. Often, you will even learn which neighborhoods should be taking shelter immediately.

Given the importance of receiving news updates, strongly consider purchasing an emergency radio that you can have available in the event of a power outage. It is easy to get cynical about tornadoes, especially if you have gone through many tornado warnings without a serious tornado touching down. That is the wrong attitude to take, however, because the one time that you do not take shelter just might be the time that a tornado causes drastic damage to your area. Far too many death tolls have accrued due to people ignoring tornado warnings, thinking it will be yet another false alarm. In short, treat every tornado warning seriously, and be ready to go to your emergency shelter if necessary.

## **WHEN THE BIG TORNADO HITS, TAKE COVER\***

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When a tornado touches down and the damage begins, there is one primary danger you have to avoid: flying debris. The overwhelming majority of tornado injuries and deaths happen when debris crashes into victims. In the worst cases, jagged pieces of debris can even impale victims due to the overwhelming speeds at which they travel. This stands to reason, given that a powerful tornado will tear homes, buildings and trees apart. In the process, bricks, wood, metal and tree bark turn into projectiles with lethal capabilities. The following tips will increase your survival odds no matter where you find yourself when a tornado strikes.

If you are in your home, you have a serious safety advantage if you prepared properly. If you have a basement, that is going to be your room that you take cover in for shelter. Damage to a basement is highly uncommon compared to the upper levels in a building. However, if you don't have a basement, more often than not you will want to find a bathroom located in the interior of your home. If your bathrooms are near windows, then find an interior hallway or closet that has no windows on the lowest floor in the home.

The reason for this strategy is that you want to put as many walls between you and the storm as possible. By combining these walls with extra padding in your shelter room of choice, you will give yourself the best possible home safety defense. One key thing to note if you live in a multi-leveled home is to remember what is



located on the floor above you. If there is a heavy object like a refrigerator or bed in the room directly above your shelter location, you stand the risk of having it crash down on you if the home's structure fails.

While you are taking cover in the home, be sure to make use of the extra padding you purchased when preparing for a tornado. If you do not own any, be sure to cover yourself with something soft, thick and covering, if possible. Mattresses, blankets or large coats can be a helpful way to shield yourself further. If those are unavailable, crawl under a table or desk to protect yourself from any flying debris. This tactic is similar to the one that most schoolchildren are familiar with from school tornado drills. If you own a helmet, whether that is a football helmet or bicycle helmet, consider wearing that to shield your head. If you have no extra padding, then curl into a ball while you cover your head with your arms. This way, if flying debris strikes you, it is far better to have it hit your arms than endure a lethal strike to your head.

While the former advice is essential, there are many myths that are perpetuated regarding tornado safety that ought to be debunked. One

of those myths is that the southwest corner of a basement is the safest place to be. Ignore this, as the winds of a tornado can and likely will hit your house in all directions. Since tornadoes generally come from the southwest, the thought was that debris would blow to the northeast, but this is not true. As such, simply find the safest part of your shelter room for your needs.

The second common myth involves opening windows. Some believe that opening windows will equalize the pressure with the low-pressure eye of the storm, preventing the house from exploding. Not only is this patently untrue, it is also exceedingly dangerous to move around during a tornado trying to open a window. This is an easy way to get killed unnecessarily, so stay put and ride out the tornado in relative safety.

If you are working at your office when the twister hits, find shelter in an interior room on the lowest floor of the office. Preferably, you can find a bathroom. At the very least, find an interior room that is far from the windows, and once there, crouch while you cover your head with hands and arms as usual. For office buildings, a first level stairwell very well might be your best bet for shelter, and never take your office elevators during a storm. The electricity is likely to go out, meaning you could get trapped in the elevator.

If you are in a mobile home, evacuate it immediately. People are more than 15 times more likely to die from a tornado if they are in a mobile home when compared with any other location. While you might think a tie-down system makes your mobile home stronger, this is still not strong enough to contend with the mighty force of a tornado. As such, evacuate and take shelter in a permanent building if one is nearby. Otherwise, lie

face down in a ditch and be sure to cover your head with your arms and heads, just like homeowners that do not have any additional protection.

Speaking of buildings that are not your home, you might find yourself in a very large and very long building when a tornado hits. Gyms, theaters, department stores and malls are prominent examples of these building types. These can be terrible places to be during a tornado, given that the roof of many of these structures is not supported well. As such, these are building that are prone to complete collapse during a strong tornado.

Due to this, these buildings will often have dedicated storm shelters to keep employees and customers safe. If they do not have one, make the best of a dicey situation by going to the lowest level. Once there, look for a bathroom towards the center of the store. If one is unavailable, try to find any room towards the center of the structure that will provide shelter. If you cannot find even that, then try to crouch underneath something sturdy, covering your face with your arms and hands in order to prevent injury from falling debris.

Finally, if you are outside and shelter is unavailable, lie flat in a low area of ground. Preferably, you will find a ditch where you can crouch and cover your head in the usual method. If possible, ensure that your spot is not located near trees that can quickly turn into deadly projectile missiles. If you are outside driving in your car, know that a vehicle is second only to mobile homes in danger. Either drive to a building with shelter quickly, or evacuate the building and locate a ditch where you can take cover. Lastly, never stop under a bridge! These

can turn into a wind tunnel that is a perfect target for flying debris. Worse, the tornado winds could lead the structure to collapsing entirely.

As you can see, your choices will be dictated to some degree by your circumstances. As a result, your choices should take those circumstances into account at all times. This guide should have you prepared for what needs to be done to keep you safe in just about any conceivable tornado circumstance you might find yourself in, so keep these tips in mind and stay safe! If your home has been hit by a tornado, you are going to want to find new shelters and tornado relief.

## **IF AFFECTED BY TORNADOES, FIND TORNADO RELIEF \***

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If your home was hit by a tornado, consider finding a reputable organization that will be on-site to assist. The American Red Cross is usually going to have a relief shelter at a location near you. There will be emergency aid stations, food, relief supplies and other essentials that individuals and families can make use of during the recovery process.

For anyone grieving or struggling to cope with the disaster, mental health services and information is often available at relief shelters as well. Finally, they will help you transition into finding a more permanent shelter after you have been provided for after the disaster.

So, there you have it. This guide has shown you the essential survival skills that take you from tornado preparedness to tornado recovery. Pass this information along to friends and family, ensuring that we will all be safer when the next tornado touches down.