

Midwest Tornadoes - May 2013

Over the past few days, the Midwestern United States has been battered by a series of violent storms that have left ruin and heartbreak in their wake. On May 20th, Moore, OK and other communities around Oklahoma City, OK experienced a catastrophic weather-related event. The images of collapsed homes, ruined schools, and mile after mile of devastation are grim reminders of the terrible and unexpected power of tornadoes.

The resources presented in this newsletter address the destructive force of tornadoes, the safety precautions that can be taken to prepare you and your family for severe weather, and ways to help younger family members cope with the distress and uncertainty of a weather-related disaster.

What Do I Need to Know About Tornadoes?



The images broadcast from Oklahoma City and the reports that join the scenes of flattened subdivisions and ruined homes reveal why tornadoes are one of nature's most destructive forces.

With 200-mph winds and the ability to topple buildings and hurl dangerous debris, the arrival of a tornado warning in your area should not be taken lightly. Learning more about tornadoes, including where they develop, how they move, and what you can expect from a tornado-related weather event, will help you make smart decisions to protect the things that matter most in your life.

Here is a list of quick facts you should know about tornadoes:

- They may strike quickly, with little or no warning.
- They may appear nearly transparent until dust and debris are picked up or a cloud forms in the funnel.
- The average tornado moves Southwest to Northeast, but tornadoes have been known to move in any direction.
- The average forward speed of a tornado is 30 mph, but may vary from stationary to 70 mph.
- Tornadoes can accompany tropical storms and hurricanes as they move onto land.
- Waterspouts are tornadoes that form over water.
- Tornadoes are most frequently reported east of the Rocky Mountains during spring and summer months.
- Peak tornado season in the southern states is March through May; in the northern states, it is late spring through early summer.
- Tornadoes are most likely to occur between 3 pm and 9 pm, but can occur at any time.

Are You Ready for a Tornado?

Prepare a Home Tornado Plan

Pick a place where family members could gather if a tornado is headed your way. It could be your basement or, if there is no basement, a center hallway, bathroom, or closet on the lowest floor. Keep this place uncluttered.

If you are in a high-rise building, you may not have enough time to go to the lowest floor. Pick a place in a hallway in the center of the building.

Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit

- First aid kit and essential medications.
- Canned food and can opener.
- At least three gallons of water per person.
- Protective clothing, bedding, or sleeping bags.
- Battery-powered radio, flashlight, and extra batteries.
- Special items for infant, elderly, or disabled family members.
- Written instructions on how to turn off electricity, gas, and water if authorities advise you to do so. (Remember, you'll need a professional to turn natural gas service back on.)

Stay Tuned for Storm Warnings

Listen to your local radio and TV stations for updated storm information.

Know what a tornado WATCH and WARNING means: A tornado WATCH means a tornado is possible in your area. A tornado WARNING means a tornado has been sighted and may be headed for your area. Go to safety immediately.

Tornado WATCHES and WARNINGS are issued by county or parish.

When a Tornado WATCH Is Issued

- Listen to local radio and TV stations for further updates.
- Be alert to changing weather conditions. Blowing debris or the sound of an approaching tornado may alert you.
- Many people say it sounds like a freight train.

When a Tornado WARNING Is Issued

- If you are inside, go to the safe place you picked to protect yourself from glass and other flying objects. The tornado may be approaching your area.
- If you are outside, hurry to the basement of a nearby sturdy building or lie flat in a ditch or low-lying area.
- If you are in a car or mobile home, get out immediately and head for safety (as above).

After the Tornado Passes

- Watch out for fallen power lines and stay out of the damaged area.
- Listen to the radio for information and instructions.
- Use a flashlight to inspect your home for damage.
- Do not use candles at any time.

Red Cross

Helping Children Cope with Disaster

Earthquakes...Tornadoes...Fires... Floods...Hurricanes... Hazardous Materials Spills...

Disaster may strike quickly and without warning. These events can be frightening for adults, but they are traumatic for children if they don't know what to do.

During a disaster, your family may have to leave your home and daily routine. Children may become anxious, confused or frightened. As an adult, you'll need to cope with the disaster in a way that will help children avoid developing a permanent sense of loss. It is important to give children guidance that will help them reduce their fears.

Children and Their Response to Disaster

Children depend on daily routines. They wake up, eat breakfast, go to school, play with friends. When emergencies or disasters interrupt this routine, children may become anxious.

In a disaster, they'll look to you and other adults for help. How you react to an emergency gives them clues on how to act. If you react with alarm, a child may become more scared. They see our fear as proof that the danger is real. If you seem overcome with a sense of loss, a child may feel their losses more strongly.

Children's fears also may stem from their imagination, and you should take these feelings seriously. A child who feels afraid is afraid. Your words and actions can provide reassurance. When talking with your child, be sure to present a realistic picture that is both honest and manageable.

Feelings of fear are healthy and natural for adults and children. But as an adult, you need to keep control of the situation. When you're sure that danger has passed, concentrate on your child's emotional needs by asking the child what's uppermost in his or her mind. Having children participate in the family's recovery activities will help them feel that their life will return to "normal." Your response during this time may have a lasting impact.

Be aware that after a disaster, children are most afraid that:

- The event will happen again
- Someone will be injured or killed
- They will be separated from the family
- They will be left alone

Advice to Parents: Prepare for Disaster

You can create a Family Disaster Plan by taking four simple steps. First, learn what hazards exist in your community and how to prepare for each. Then meet with your family to discuss what you would do, as a group, in each situation.

Next, take steps to prepare your family for disaster such as: posting emergency phone numbers, selecting an out-of-state family contact, assembling disaster supplies kits for each member of your household and installing smoke detectors on each level of your home. Finally, practice your Family Disaster Plan so that everyone will remember what to do when a disaster does occur.

- **Develop and practice a Family Disaster Plan.** Contact your local emergency management or civil defense office, or your local Red Cross chapter for materials that describe how your family can create a disaster plan. Everyone in the household, including children, should play a part in the family's response and recovery efforts.
- **Teach your child how to recognize danger signals.** Make sure your child knows what smoke detectors, fire alarms and local community warning systems (horns, sirens) sound like.
- **Explain how to call for help.** Teach your child how and when to call for help. Check the telephone directory for local emergency phone numbers and post these phone numbers by all telephones. If you live in a 9-1-1-service area, tell your child to call 9-1-1.
- **Help your child memorize important family information.** Children should memorize their family name, address and phone number. They should also know where to meet in case of an emergency. Some children may not be old enough to memorize the information. They could carry a small index card that lists emergency information to give to an adult or babysitter.

After the Disaster: Time for Recovery

Immediately after the disaster, try to reduce your child's fear and anxiety. Keep the family together. While you look for housing and assistance, you may want to leave your children with relatives or friends. Instead, keep the family together as much as possible and make children a part of what you are doing to get the family back on its feet.

Children get anxious, and they'll worry that their parents won't return. Calmly and firmly explain the situation. As best as you can, tell children what you know about the disaster. Explain what will happen next. For example, say, "Tonight, we will all stay together in the shelter." Get down to the child's eye level and talk to them. Encourage children to talk. Let children talk about the disaster and ask questions as much as they want. Encourage children to describe what they're feeling. Listen to what they say.

If possible, include the entire family in the discussion. Include children in recovery activities. Give children chores that are their responsibility. This will help children feel they are part of the recovery. Having a task will help them understand that everything will be all right.

You can help children cope by understanding what causes their anxieties and fears. Reassure them with firmness and love. Your children will realize that life will eventually return to normal. If a child does not respond to the above suggestions, seek help from a mental health specialist or a member of the clergy.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Support for the Oklahoma City Tornado

On Monday, May 20th, Oklahoma City saw a sudden and deadly escalation of a severe weather system to an F4 tornado. Response and recovery efforts include the continued search for the missing, reconnecting loved ones separated during the storm, and assessing when and where to begin rebuilding lost communities.

Please use and share the links below to learn more about the recovery efforts, the resources available to those directly impacted by the storm, and the additional support you can provide for friends, loved ones, and others living in and around Oklahoma City.

[American Red Cross - Safe & Well Website](#) - Use this link to reconnect with friends, family, and loved ones.

[American Red Cross - Open Shelters List](#) - Use this link to locate open shelters that have been set up in and around your local community.

[American Red Cross Shelter Finder App](#) - Download this app for your iPhone or Android smartphone to locate open shelters in your area.

[Federal Disaster Relief Aid](#) - If your county has been declared a disaster site, you may be eligible for disaster relief aid. Use this link to apply.

[FEMA Oklahoma Disaster Information Site](#) - This section of the website for The Federal Emergency Management Agency features updates and information on the current response to the Oklahoma City Tornado.

[FEMA Official Twitter Account](#) - Live updates and information are available on the official Twitter account for The Federal Emergency Management Agency.

[CNN Oklahoma Tornado Updates and Developments](#) - A special news feed provided by CNN that features information and updates related to the response and recovery efforts in Oklahoma City, OK.

[KFOR-TV News in Oklahoma](#) - Live and local news coverage of the recovery efforts currently underway and information for Oklahoma City residents in need of additional information.