



Disaster Facts - Tornadoes

Tornadoes often accompany hurricanes, and while they can strike at any time of the year, they occur most frequently during April, May and June. In an average year, 800 tornadoes are reported nationwide, resulting in 80 deaths and over 1,500 injuries. A **tornado is defined as a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground.** The most violent tornadoes are capable of tremendous destruction with wind speeds of 250 mph or more. Damage paths can be in excess of one mile wide and 50 miles long.

What causes tornadoes?

Thunderstorms develop in warm, moist air in advance of eastward-moving cold fronts. These thunderstorms often produce large hail, strong winds, and tornadoes. Tornadoes occasionally accompany tropical storms and hurricanes that move over land. Tornadoes are most common to the right and ahead of the path of the storm center as it comes onshore.

Tornadoes may form during the early stages of rapidly developing thunderstorms. Tornadoes may appear transparent until dust and debris are picked up. Occasionally, two or more tornadoes may occur at the same time.

A **tornado watch** is issued when conditions are favorable for tornadoes to develop (often during severe thunderstorms). This **does not** mean that a tornado will occur, just that it is possible.

A **tornado warning** means that a tornado has actually been sighted on the ground or a funnel cloud has been spotted.

The safest place to be during a tornado is in a basement, under something sturdy like a workbench or strong table. If there is no basement, **go to a small interior room in the middle of the house, like a closet or a bathroom.** Stay away from outside walls and windows. **Never seek shelter in a car.**

Opening windows to equalize pressure during a tornado is ineffective in reducing damage, and adds to the risk of flying glass.

Hail often accompanies severe storms, so move cars inside a garage or carport if possible to avoid damage. Keep your car keys and house keys on your person.

If time permits, move lawn furniture and yard equipment inside so that they do not become airborne.

Environmental Clues - Tornadoes

Look out for:

- A dark, often greenish sky
- Large hail
- A loud roaring sound – similar to a freight train
- Some tornadoes appear as a visible funnel extending only partially to the ground. Look for signs of debris below the visible funnel.
- Some tornadoes are clearly visible while others are obscured by rain or nearby low-hanging clouds.

Other Hazards

- Flash floods
- Lightning
- Damaging straight-line winds
- Large hail – can reach the size of a grapefruit

Tornado Myths and Facts

Myth: Areas near rivers, lakes and mountains are safe from tornadoes.

Fact: No place is safe from tornadoes.

Myth: The low pressure with a tornado causes buildings to “explode” as the tornado passes overhead.

Fact: Violent winds and debris slamming into buildings cause most structural damage.

Myth: Windows should be opened before a tornado approaches to equalize pressure and minimize damage.

Fact: Opening windows allows damaging winds to enter the structure. Leave the windows alone; instead, immediately go to a safe place.