

Staying Safe During Tornado Season

Environment Canada issues weather advisories to notify the public of potentially dangerous weather systems. Two types of notices are issued ‘watches’ and ‘warnings’.

Watches are issued when conditions are favourable for the development of severe weather. Watches are typically issued for local weather events in which the timing and location of occurrence remains uncertain; such as severe thunderstorms or tornadoes. A watch is normally issued several hours in advance.

Warnings are issued when severe weather is either imminent or occurring. Tornado warnings by their nature will be issued less than one hour in advance. Tornado warnings may be issued specifically for smaller “sub-regions” within the regular forecast area.

There are several atmospheric warning signs that precipitate a tornado’s arrival:

- A dark, often greenish sky
- Wall clouds
- Large hail often in the absence of rain
- Before a tornado strikes, the wind may die down and the air may become very still
- A loud roar similar to a freight train may be heard
- An approaching cloud of debris, even if a funnel is not visible

Although Environment Canada issues weather advisories, lead time notification for tornadoes is often twenty minutes or less leaving little time to implement proper warning and evacuation strategies.

The following safety measures identify how we can protect ourselves and our families prior to and during a tornado:

- Monitor Environment Canada watches and warnings and keep an eye on the sky – tornadoes can develop very rapidly.
- When a tornado threatens, take shelter immediately – preferably in the lower level of a sturdy building away from windows (i.e. basements, bathrooms or stairwells).
- Flying glass and other debris pose the greatest danger to human safety.
- Seek safety under a sturdy table or create a protective covering such as a mattress or thick layer of blankets to protect from flying debris.
- When a watch is issued ensure that all doors and windows are closed. Recent research has shown that tornado winds finding their way into a building through open doors and windows can lead to large internal pressures and greater damage.
- If caught outdoors with no shelter available, lie flat in a ditch, ravine or other low lying area and shield your head with your arms.
- If in a vehicle caught by extreme winds or flying debris:
 - Park the car as quickly and safely as possible – out of the traffic lanes.
 - Stay in the car with the seat belt on.
 - Put your head down below the windows; cover your head with your hands and a coat or blanket if possible.
 - If you can safely get noticeably lower than the level of the road, leave your car and lie in that area, covering your head with your hands.

Avoid seeking shelter under bridges which can create deadly traffic hazards while offering little protection against flying debris.

Having the knowledge that a tornado is approaching, having already developed a response plan and exercising the identified safety strategies is key to surviving and mitigating the impacts of a tornado. As is the case in all emergencies the key to survival lies in proper planning and education.