

Are You Prepared for Nature's Powerful Punch?

Know what to do before a tornado strikes

Have you taken time to create a tornado safety plan? It could be one of the most valuable conversations you'll ever have with family members and loved ones. As we transition from colder weather to springtime temperatures, constant climactic changes can generate conditions favorable for triggering a tornado.

According to the National Weather Service, around 1,200 tornadoes are reported each year in the U.S. In 2006, tornadoes were responsible for 66 fatalities. Only a small portion of all tornadoes are violent enough to cause death and destruction, but with peak tornado season upon us, it's important to have a tornado safety plan in the event of a severe storm.

"We hear a lot about having a home fire escape plan, but you shouldn't forget to also prepare for a potential tornado," says local agent Eric Nier. "The time to start thinking about a tornado isn't when you hear weather warnings and sirens in your neighborhood. Make the time to have a tornado safety plan in place today for you and your family."

Eric Nier Insurance and the National Weather Service offer some vital tips for building a tornado safety plan:

If you are in a:

Home with a basement: Take shelter in the basement and stay away from windows that may shatter and produce flying glass. Try to take cover under something heavy and sturdy, such as a table or a work bench. If those aren't available, cover yourself under a mattress or sleeping bag. Also be aware of where heavy objects such as refrigerators and pianos are on the floors above you and avoid taking shelter beneath those areas. Floors may lose support in a severely damaged home.

Home without a basement: Get to the lowest floor and take shelter in a small room such as a bathroom, closet or interior hallway near the center of the home and away from windows. Crouch face down on the floor with your arms covering your head.

A mobile home: Leave immediately - you are more likely to be safer away from a mobile home even if the only alternative is to seek shelter somewhere outside. You should head for a designated tornado shelter for your community or identify a nearby, sturdy building where you can gain access in case of emergency. If you must take cover outside, lie flat on low ground away from mobile homes that may produce flying debris in severe storms. Protect your head and try to find a spot away from trees and cars which may become unstable in high winds.

Residential or office building: Move away from all windows and take cover in an enclosed area in the center of the building. Interior stairwells are also good areas for protection that also provide access to lower floors. Crouch face down on the floor with your arms covering your head. Avoid taking elevators in the event of a power failure.

When at school: Students should follow procedures practiced in school tornado drills. Move to an interior hallway or designated shelter area and crouch face down on the floor with your arms protecting your head. Keep away from windows and stay out of large, open areas like gymnasiums and auditoriums.

General Tornado Protection Tips

Know the difference between a watch and a warning: The National Weather Service issues a tornado watch when the conditions are right for the possible formation of a tornado. A tornado warning is issued when an actual tornado is present. Monitor weather conditions through TV, radio, or Internet reports.

Seek shelter: Once a warning has been issued, take shelter. Basements and storm cellars offer the best protection. If a basement or storm cellar is not available, find a small room in the center of the building such as a closet or bathroom. Also, because most tornado-related injuries and deaths result from flying debris, stay clear of the windows in your shelter area.

Don't try to outrun a tornado: With tornadoes capable of traveling at speeds of up to 70 miles per hour, it's dangerous to try to outrun them. If you are in a car, stop, get out and seek shelter in a strong, sturdy building. If you are in an open area, lie face down and cover your head to protect yourself from flying debris.

Keep fresh batteries in radios and flashlights: Radio weather reports help you pay close attention to weather developments and alert you when it's safe to leave your temporary shelter. Flashlights are necessary to navigate through the dark and can help you safely escape from damage and debris that may be around.

In the event of a severe weather emergency, it's always important to stay calm and stick to the tornado safety plan designed to protect you and your family.

For more information on this and other safety topics, contact Eric Nier Insurance at 715-341-3838 or 1-800-886-8135.