

Severe Weather Preparedness Week March 3-9



March 3 through 9 is National Severe Weather Preparedness Week

March 3 through 9 is Severe Weather Preparedness Week. Severe weather, in the form of tornadoes, lightning, flash floods, damaging winds, and destructive hail, strikes Illinois and Indiana each spring, summer and fall, sometimes with incredible violence.

The National Weather Service (NWS) urges you to develop a safety plan for use at your home, workplace, school, vehicle, and for outdoor activities. Be aware of severe weather safety rules. Planning ahead and knowing what to do might save your life. For more information visit the Illinois Emergency Management Agency web site at <http://ready.illinois.gov/>.

The National Weather Service is building a "Weather-Ready Nation". The purpose of the Weather-Ready Nation initiative is to save lives and livelihoods.

By increasing the nation's weather-readiness, the country will be prepared to protect, mitigate, respond to, and recover from weather-related disasters. The NWS urges you to become a "Force of Nature". Being a force of nature goes beyond taking appropriate preparedness action. It's about inspiring others to do the same. The NWS is asking people not only to be prepared, but also to encourage their social network to act by texting, tweeting, or posting a Facebook status update. For more information visit <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/com/weatherreadynation/>

Tornado Watches and Warnings

Tornadoes are the most destructive storms that occur in Illinois. Being prepared for a tornado can save your life.

A tornado watch means severe thunderstorms and tornadoes are possible in your area over the next few hours. Be prepared. Watches are issued by the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, OK (<http://www.spc.noaa.gov/>) for large areas, typically portions of states, and usually for 4 to 6 hours.

A tornado warning means a tornado has been sighted by a trained storm spotter, or intense rotation that will likely produce a tornado has been detected by Doppler radar. Get to a place of safety immediately! Warnings are issued by your local National Weather Service office on a storm by storm basis, usually for portions of counties, for 30 to 60 minutes.

Statewide Tornado Drill Tuesday March 5

Tuesday March 5 at 1000 AM CST a test tornado warning will be issued for all Illinois counties. (A test tornado warning for Indiana will be issued March 27)

Many locations in Illinois will also test sirens on Tuesday morning.

The test warnings will be disseminated through NOAA Weather Radio with the tone alarm and SAME codes. Many commercial radio and TV stations will participate by passing along the test tornado warning. The test will be postponed to Wednesday March 6 if severe weather threatens.

This would be a good time to review your severe weather procedures or conduct a tornado drill at your home, school, or place of business.

Tornadoes and Tornado Safety

In Illinois and Indiana, most tornadoes occur from April through June, during the mid afternoon through early evening hours, but they can occur anytime of day and any month of the year. Last year, Illinois had 30 tornadoes, which caused 111 injuries and 9 fatalities. The most devastating tornado was an EF4 which struck the town of Harrisburg on February 29 around 500 AM, killing 8 people. The 30-year average in Illinois is 46 tornadoes. Illinois ranks fifth in the nation in tornado frequency per square mile.

When a tornado threatens, you may only have seconds to save yourself and your family. Have a preparedness plan for your home, school, and workplace. Know where to find the best tornado shelter.

- In a home, go to the basement and get under the stairwell, or under a heavy piece of furniture. If there is no basement, go to an interior closet, hall or bathroom on

the lowest floor and stay away from windows. Cover your head with pillows or sofa cushions.

- In schools, hospitals, churches and office buildings, go to small interior rooms or interior halls on the lowest floor. Long corridors with doors or windows on the end can act as wind tunnels. Stay away from windows. Avoid large open areas with free span roofs such as gymnasiums and cafeterias.
- In steel and concrete high rise buildings, it is not necessary to get to the lowest floor, but go to interior halls, bathrooms or closets. Stay away from windows.
- In shopping centers, avoid large open areas and glass. Seek shelter in bathrooms, small interior spaces and behind counters. Do not attempt to escape in your vehicle.
- Abandon mobile homes and vehicles for a nearby reinforced building. As a last resort lie flat in a ditch. Do not seek shelter under an overpass.

Lightning Safety

Lightning is the most frequent important weather threat to personal safety during the thunderstorm season. Keep these lightning safety tips in mind; Plan ahead and avoid dangerous lightning situations. Check the latest forecast before going outdoors for extended periods. Watch for storms and seek shelter indoors when storms approach.

Lightning often strikes the tallest object. If caught outdoors during a storm, don't stand next to tall trees or power poles. And don't be out in an open area where you may be the tallest object. A closed, hard top metal vehicle is safe in a thunderstorm. An open structure such as a picnic shelter will keep you dry but it will not protect you from lightning.

If boating or swimming, get out of the water when storms approach and seek shelter indoors.

Avoid using electrical appliances, corded telephones and metal plumbing when indoors during a thunderstorm. It is okay to use a cell phone or cordless phone. The best way to stay safe from lightning is to go indoors as soon as there is a threat. A good way to remember is, "when thunder roars, go indoors!" There is NO safe place outdoors when lightning is present

Look for more information during national lightning safety awareness week June 23 through June 29 or visit www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov.

Flash Flood Safety

A flash flood is a rapid rise in creeks and streams, or serious urban flooding, caused by heavy rain from thunderstorms, which poses a threat to life and property. Floods and flash floods kill more people nationwide than any other storm hazard, in most years. In Illinois, most flash floods occur in July and August, and they often occur at night.

About half of all flash flood related deaths occur in vehicles. Don't drive through flooded roads, especially if the water is moving rapidly. Flooded or washed out roads are especially difficult to see at night. Remember, if you encounter a flooded road, "Turn around, don't drown!"

Don't let children play near storm drains, creeks or flooded areas.

If you live near a creek or stream, evacuate to higher ground if water rises rapidly or if a flash flood warning is issued.

Urban flooding is also potentially dangerous. Heavy rain that results in flooding of streets, viaducts and underpasses in an urban area can pose a threat to motorists. Heavy rain can also result in flooded basements, ponding of water in low spots and rapid flooding of drainage ditches and storm sewer systems.

March 17 through 23 is national flood safety awareness week. For more information, visit www.floodsafety.noaa.gov.

Severe Thunderstorm Safety

Severe thunderstorms pose a threat to life and property. They produce damaging downburst winds of around 60 mph or greater, and/or large destructive hail, one inch in diameter or greater. Flooding rains, frequent cloud to ground lightning, and tornadoes are also possible in severe thunderstorms.

A *severe thunderstorm watch* means severe thunderstorms are possible in the next few hours. Be prepared.

A *severe thunderstorm warning* means a thunderstorm capable of causing property damage and injury has been sighted or detected by radar. Go indoors and stay away from windows.

Damaging straight line or downburst winds from a thunderstorm can do as much damage as a weak to moderate tornado, so take severe thunderstorm warnings seriously.

Very large hail, golf ball or larger, is not only very destructive, but it occurs with the most violent of storms.

Have Redundant Methods to Receive Severe Weather Warnings

Today, a better understanding of tornadoes, new technology such as dual-pol Doppler radar, faster communications, and better Skywarn storm spotting networks, allow meteorologists to provide more accurate and timely warnings for destructive tornadoes and severe storms. But in order for the warnings to be effective, people must receive the warnings in a timely manner and take proper actions to protect themselves.

The best way to receive severe weather watches and warnings is with a tone alert NOAA Weather Radio – All Hazards. A weather radio will give you severe weather information direct from your local National Weather Service office.

Watches and warnings are preceded by a tone alert that can automatically activate your radio and get your attention with a high pitched alarm – even if storms hit in the middle of the night. S.A.M.E equipped radios can be programmed to only alert you to watches and warnings for a specific county, or group of counties.

In addition, the radios can alert you to a non-weather emergency such as a hazardous material spill or child abduction.

Weather radios can be purchased at many electronics and department stores for 30 to 80 dollars. They are highly recommended for homes, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, day care centers, and businesses. You should also take one

along when boating or camping. More information about weather radio can be found at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/index.html>

Remember, sirens are outdoor warning systems and should not be your primary method of receiving tornado warnings.

You can get up to the minute forecasts, watches, warnings, storm reports, radar images, satellite pictures, climate data, severe weather safety information, and more from NOAA's National Weather Service online at weather.gov/chicago. You can view warnings graphically to see if you are in the path of a warned storm. For your mobile device you can go to mobile.weather.gov.

Although not directly provided by NWS, there are many vendors who provide weather apps for smart phones, which can send watches and warnings to your phone.

The FCC, DHS, and NWS have teamed up with the nation's wireless phone service providers, who will broadcast Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) to mobile devices for tornadoes, flash floods and other life-threatening weather events. If you have a WEA capable device and are within range of a cell phone tower that is within a warned area, you will receive an alert. It will be like a text message but with a distinct tone. For more information, go to <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/com/weatherreadynation/wea.html>. For information about your device, contact your wireless service provider or visit <http://www.ctia.org/wea>.

Lots more information can be found at the national "[Weather-Ready Nation](http://www.weather.gov)" site.