

Are You Prepared for Tornado Season?

Know the warning signs and have a plan

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), an average of 1,253 tornadoes occur each year in the U.S. As of December 20, 2017, there have been 1,359 reports of tornadoes in the U.S., and a total of 38 tornado-related deaths.

Historically, most tornadoes happen in the spring and early summer, but in recent years the U.S. has experienced tornadoes during all times of the year. They can occur anywhere and have been reported in all 50 states.

For most tornadoes, warnings are issued 15 to 20 minutes in advance of the weather event. While technology has improved to help alert us to danger, there is still a gap between receiving a warning and responding to that warning. Often that gap has to do with preparedness. Therefore, advanced planning is crucial to making sure you stay safe when a tornado touches down.

Know the Signs

Tornadoes are particularly dangerous, because, unlike hurricanes, tornadoes can develop suddenly and without time for a warning. The science of weather forecasting is not perfect and some tornadoes do occur without a tornado warning ever being issued. There is no substitute for staying abreast of the weather. Weather conditions that could indicate a tornado may form include:

- Dark, greenish sky;

- Hail or heavy rain followed by either dead calm or a fast, intense wind shift;
- Strong, persistent rotation in the cloud base;
- Whirling dust or debris on the ground under a low-lying cloud — tornadoes sometimes have no funnel;
- Loud, continuous roar, like a freight train, which doesn't fade in a few seconds like thunder;
- Frequent, intense lightning; and
- Strong winds greater than 60 mph.

Seek Safety in a Storm Shelter

If your school district is under a tornado warning, your staff and students must seek shelter immediately. If a school doesn't have a storm shelter, students and staff should go to the lowest interior level of the school, the basement or a room with no windows or exterior doors, such as an interior bathroom. The goal is to put as many walls as possible between your students and staff and the outside. If possible, advise students to get under a sturdy table and use their arms to protect their head and neck.

Do not use areas with large roof spans such as gymnasiums, auditoriums, cafeterias, etc. Do not use temporary or portable classrooms or hallways that have glass doors at each end that open to the outdoors.

If you are using a hallway, use interior hallways at a 90-degree angle to through-hallways that exit to the outside to help reduce wind-tunnel effects. If you have time, hide in hallway shelter areas to reduce exposure to flying debris and other hazards.

Tornado Preparedness Checklists

Preseason do-do Checklist:

- Form a safety committee to develop or review plans and coordinate emergency response protocols.
- Develop an emergency plan and train people on the plan.
- Designate safety leaders — determine roles and responsibilities.
- Develop decision-making protocols regarding temporary classrooms, special needs students, assembly areas, outdoor activities, etc.
- Establish protocols for delayed release times.
- Identify means of communication for buses, coaches, etc.
- Conduct a preseason survey of all shelter spaces.
- Prepare emergency equipment and supplies.
- Make provisions for quick shutoff of utilities.
- Identify potential post-event assembly areas.

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- Communicate/coordinate plans with local emergency response personnel.
- Train employees, staff and students.
- Conduct practice drills.

■ **Prestorm Checklist**

What to do before the storm:

- Keep a weather alert radio in the main office and monitor conditions for current information.
- Communicate with safety leaders as you are tracking weather conditions.
- When school is in session, suspend or postpone outdoor physical education, recess, field trips and any activities located away from the school. The same applies to after-school sporting events and practices, clubs and field trips.
- Assemblies, events and other activities scheduled to take place in areas with large roof spans should be suspended or postponed. Large roof spans can be

susceptible to collapse and are not recommended as tornado shelters.

- Anticipate the evacuation to shelters of students and staff in temporary or portable classrooms, special needs students, and younger children as severe weather approaches.
- Should severe weather be approaching at release time, implement your delayed release plan/protocol and communicate this information to staff, students and parents.

■ **Post-Event Checklist — After a Tornado Strike**

What to do after a storm hits:

- Provide immediate directions to those in shelter areas. If shelter areas appear undamaged and safe, remain in the space until further directions are given.
- If necessary, send a preassigned staff member to shut off building gas, electric and water as needed.
- Check the identified post-event

assembly areas for hazards. Outdoor areas should be checked for downed power lines and hazardous debris. Indoor areas should be checked for damage, debris and other hazards. Choose the best available area.

- Direct staff and shelter supervisors to assemble all persons in the designated assembly area for a head count, first-aid assistance, etc.
- Implement post-event staff assignments, including building security, student supervision, traffic control and first aid.
- Do not allow anyone to enter a damaged building. Secure the building as needed to keep persons away from weak structures and wreckage until professionals arrive to assess the structure and clear away debris.
- Follow your child/parent reunification procedures.

Gallagher is an endorsed agency through the WASB Insurance Plan. For more information, visit wasb.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ... visit these websites.

- Ready: ready.gov
- Federal Emergency Management Agency – fema.gov
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security: dhs.gov
- The Society for Human Resource Management – shrm.com