

North Texas and Oklahoma have experienced various tornados in the past few weeks. Knowing what to do when you see a tornado, or when you hear a tornado warning, can help protect you and your family. During a tornado, people face hazards from extremely high winds and risk being struck by flying and falling objects. After a tornado, the wreckage left behind poses additional injury risks. Although nothing can be done to prevent tornadoes, there are actions you can take for your health and safety.

When there are thunderstorms in your area, turn on your radio or TV to get the latest emergency information from local authorities. Listen for announcements of a tornado watch or tornado warning.

Important Measures To Take

- Take a few minutes with your family to develop a tornado emergency plan. Sketch a floor plan of where you live, or walk through each room and discuss where and how to seek shelter.
- Show a second way to exit from each room or area. If you need special equipment, such as a rope ladder, mark where it is located.
- Make sure everyone understands the siren warning system, if there's such a system in your area.
- Mark where your first-aid kit and fire extinguishers are located.
- Mark where the utility switches or valves are located so they can be turned off--if time permits--in an emergency.
- Teach your family how to administer basic first aid, how to use a fire extinguisher, and how and when to turn off water, gas, and electricity in your home.
- Learn the emergency dismissal policy for your child's school.
- Make sure your children know--
 - What a tornado is
 - What tornado watches and warnings are
 - What county or parish they live in (warnings are issued by county or parish)
 - How to take shelter, whether at home or at school.

Extra Measures for People with Disabilities or those with Access and Functional Needs

- Write down your specific needs, limitations, capabilities, and medications. Keep this list near you always--perhaps in your purse or wallet.
- Find someone nearby (a spouse, roommate, friend, neighbor, relative, or co-worker) who will agree to assist you in case of an emergency. Give him or her a copy of your list. You may also want to provide a spare key to your home, or directions to find a key.
- Keep aware of weather conditions through whatever means are accessible to you. Some options are closed captioning or scrolled warnings on TV, radio bulletins, or call-in weather information lines.

Practicing Your Emergency Plan

Conduct drills and ask questions to make sure your family remembers information on tornado safety, particularly how to recognize hazardous weather conditions and how to take shelter.

Writing Down Important Information

Make a list of important information. Include these on your list:

- Important telephone numbers, such as emergency (police and fire), paramedics, and medical centers.
- Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of your insurance agents, including policy types and numbers.
- Telephone numbers of the electric, gas, and water companies.
- Names and telephone numbers of neighbors.
- Name and telephone number of your landlord or property manager.
- Important medical information (for example, allergies, regular medications, and brief medical history).
- Year, model, license, and identification numbers of your vehicles (automobiles, boats, and RVs).
- Bank's or credit union's telephone number, and your account numbers.
- Radio and television broadcast stations to tune to for emergency broadcast information.

Storing Important Documents

Store the following documents in a fire- and water-proof safe:

- Birth certificates
- Ownership certificates (autos, boats, etc.)
- Social security cards
- Insurance policies
- Will
- Household inventory
 - List of contents of household; include serial numbers, if applicable
 - Photographs or videotape of contents of every room
 - Photographs of items of high values, such as jewelry, paintings, collection items

Shutting Off Utilities

Gas

After a tornado, DO NOT USE matches, lighters, or appliances, or operate light switches until you are sure there are no gas leaks. Sparks from electrical switches could ignite gas and cause an explosion.

If you smell the odor of gas or if you notice a large consumption of gas being registered on the gas meter, shut off the gas immediately. First, find the main shut-off valve located on a pipe next to the gas meter. Use an adjustable wrench to turn the valve to the "off" position.

Electricity

After a major disaster, shut off the electricity. Sparks from electrical switches could ignite leaking gas and cause an explosion.

Water

- Water may be turned off at either of two locations:
 1. At the main meter, which controls the water flow to the entire property.
 2. At the water main leading into the home. If you may need an emergency source of fresh water, it is better to shut off your water here, because it will conserve the water in your water heater.
 3. "L" brackets, corner brackets, or aluminum molding, to attach tall or top-heavy furniture to the wall.
 4. Eyebolts, to secure items located a short distance from the wall.
- Attach a valve wrench to the water line. (This tool can be purchased at most hardware stores.)
- Label the water mains for quick identification.

Arranging and Securing Household Items

- Arrange furniture so that chairs and beds are away from windows, mirrors, and picture frames.
- Place heavy or large items on lower shelves.
- Secure your large appliances, especially your water heater, with flexible cable, braided wire, or metal strapping.
- Identify top-heavy, free-standing furniture, such as bookcases and china cabinets, that could topple over.
- Secure your furniture by using one of two methods.
- Install sliding bolts or childproof latches on all cabinet doors.
- Store all hazardous materials such as poisons and solvents--
 - in a sturdy, latched or locked cabinet
 - in a well-ventilated area
 - away from emergency food or water supplies

Texas Division of Emergency Management: Tornado Preparedness:

<http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/Preparedness/tips/tornadoSafetyTips.htm>

Accessible Content for Preparedness (American Sign Language)

<http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem/asl/>

CDC Tornado Preparedness <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/tornadoes/>

FEMA Tornado Preparedness: <http://www.ready.gov/tornadoes>