



Victim Services of Waterloo Region

Tornado Preparedness pt. 1/2

Tornados occur almost annually in our area, and can cause great destruction. While you might not be able to prevent damage to your home or car, with some common sense preparations you can help to ensure that your family is safe.

What is a Tornado?

A tornado is a violent windstorm characterized by a twisting, funnel-shaped cloud. It is spawned by a thunderstorm and produced when cool air overrides a layer of warm air, forcing the warm air to rise rapidly. Tornado season is generally March through August, although tornadoes can occur at any time of year. They tend to occur in the afternoons and evenings: over 80 percent of all tornadoes strike between noon and midnight.

Always be Prepared

One of the best things that you can do to increase your chances of survival is to be prepared. It is wise to assume that we will experience one each year, and to plan for it.

Conduct Tornado Drills

During emergencies people often panic. If your family has a plan that you have practiced, knowing what to do can help people to remain calm and act quickly. Remember to involve ALL family members in your plan, including children and pets (keep cages, crates and leashes easily accessible). If someone in your family has special needs, remember to consider those needs when making your plan.

Designate an area of your home to be your emergency shelter. The basement is generally best, or an enclosed part of your home such as a

hallway or washroom (without windows). Practice having everyone assemble there, and try to improve your speed. Have everyone meet in the centre of the room and hold on to something heavy or stationary, like a large table. Practice protecting your head and neck - lace your fingers over the back of your neck and hold your arms tight against the sides of your head).

Keep a stock of emergency supplies in this location, including:

- A flashlight and extra batteries
- A battery operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food, baby formula (if applicable) and bottled water (consider any critical dietary restrictions your family might have, and have food for pets as well. Non-perishable items only!)
- First aid kit and manual
- A non-electric can opener
- Essential medications
- Cash, identification and credit cards
- A cell phone or CB radio
- Eye glasses
- Sturdy shoes
- A change of clothing for each person
- Blankets
- A wrench to shut off gas and water
- A stroller/child carrier, wheelchair/walker or pet carrier, if applicable

Remember, tornados do not always occur when the family is all together at home. Create a family communication plan to help insure that you can be reunited safely if separated during a tornado. It may be easier to have a friend or family member who is long distance act as the main contact, as it is likely that their phone line will be operational. Make sure everyone memorizes their contact information!

In the event that your family is not home, teach them to avoid being outside. If they cannot find a building to take shelter in they should find a low lying area or ditch to lie in, or crouch near a strong building. They should protect their neck and head, and be aware of the potential for flooding.

If at school or work during a tornado, go to the basement of the building, or to an interior room or hallway on the main floor. Places with wide spanning roofs like auditoriums, arenas or shopping malls should be avoided. Hold on to something heavy and stationary.

It is also important to teach your family car safety during tornados. NEVER ATTEMPT TO OUTDRIVE A TORNADO! Changes in direction and speed can cause vehicles to be lifted and thrown. Evacuate the car immediately and follow the instructions for finding shelter outdoors.

Listen to the radio and watch TV

When the sky looks grim, turn on your radio or television. During an emergency, local stations will broadcast storm warnings and tornado sightings, either verbally or via a news ticker at the bottom of the screen.

A **tornado watch** means tornados are possible in your area – take the family someplace safe to listen for further information. A **tornado warning** is only issued if a tornado has been sighted or picked up on weather radar, so get to a safe place immediately.

Know the signs

Even if a funnel cloud is not visible, an approaching cloud of debris may signal a tornado approaching. Before a tornado hits wind may die down and the air may become

very still – “the calm before the storm” . It is not uncommon for tornados to occur during an otherwise bright, sunny day.

Property Adjustments

There are areas with a large history of tornadoes, known as “Tornado Belts”. If you live in such an area you may want to make some of the following adjustments to your home.

1. Make sure your home complies with the most current version of the Ontario Building Code. While it is not written with tornado safety in mind, it is designed to insure that your home is more secure and safe, with adequate exits available.
2. Reinforce masonry walls, chimneys, wooden frames and concrete to ensure that the frame of your home is secured and resists gravity forces.
3. Retrofit or install garage doors that are wind resistant. This limits damage not only to the doors themselves, but also to your walls and roof.
4. Simplify your roof line - eliminate dormers and choose a simple style such as a hip or gable roof.
5. Ensure that your mobile home is secured to its foundation, and consider a double wide model, as they are more secure. If you live in a mobile home, please seek shelter in a more secured location (such as a basement) if needed.
6. If you live or vacation in a mobile home, consider securing it to a foundation. In an emergency, remember to obey authorities and seek a more secure location such as a basement or storm shelter.



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