

# How to Prepare for a Tornado

By Curt Hagedorn

No matter what you've seen on television or in the movies, you cannot outrun a tornado. The stories of people being plucked gently from their beds by a tornado and set down just as gently on the ground miles away are just that, stories. Though there is probably no more awe-inspiring and terrifying sight than of funnel cloud twisting its way to earth like a ten-ton wisp of smoke, the only direction to head when you see a tornado is away, and fast. If you live in a tornado prone area – and even if you don't, tornadoes have been sighted in recent years in places not usually known for them like New Jersey and Los Angeles – you should have a clear strategy which you have communicated to every member of your family regarding tornado watches, warnings or an actual event.

As always, your first responsibility is to listen to and follow instructions and know what they mean...tornadoes are difficult to predict and can strike with very little warning, so if your local newsman says you are under a tornado watch and you hear sirens going off, take it VERY seriously. Like any kind of natural disaster, your personal safety and that of your family is paramount – there's very little you can do if a tornado does strike in your area. So make sure your family has a plan, which everyone understands, of where everyone is going to go and whom they are going to contact should a tornado occur.

Know what your children's school authorities do in the event of tornadoes, and what if anything you can do if you are in your car or caught out in the open. Remember, when you hear a tornado warning, you need to go to the lowest place possible, away from windows and doors, and if you have no basement, go to a center hallway in your house. If you are outdoors, lie on the ground as flat as possible, preferably in a drainage ditch or depression. If you are in your car or live in an RV or mobile home, get out and find a safe place in a building or low lying area. Sometimes you will hear a tornado before you see it, most people say it sounds like a freight train.

Most of the devastation of a tornado is experienced after it passes through your area. Make sure that you have a mobile family survival kit of some kind, whether it's all in a backpack or wheeled case or simply in something you can quickly pick up and carry with you. If you live in tornado prone areas, you should have survival materials in the "safe spot" in your home where your family will gather in the event of a tornado, as well as certain basics like flashlights, water and first aid in your automobiles and trucks and even on your person. The American Red Cross recommends at least 3 gallons of water per person, canned food (and a non-electric can opener), protective clothing and bedding, plenty of flashlights, batteries, a portable radio and the like.

Your local hardware, camping or sporting goods store can help you put together a complete, compact and portable survival kit for your family which you'll probably never appreciate fully until you have to use it. Also, remember to have cash, duplicate or extra credit cards, checks and other persona papers (like insurance policies) in with your survival kit, and store valuables in the safe area of your home if possible. If you are trapped in your home after a tornado, remain calm, treat any injuries as best you can and if you are lucky enough to have a working cell phone or other way of communicating (including yelling) call for help. Remember, after a tornado there is a great deal of danger from building collapse, open gas lines, loose power lines and so on so proceed carefully and to not assume something is safe because it looks safe – a pool of water could be electrified and a random match, cigarette or spark could cause an explosion. If you can find a safe way to evacuate after a tornado, do so quickly and immediately contact authorities for instructions.

Copyright © 2005 Publishers-Edge

