

Severe Weather Preparedness Week in North Carolina is March 7-13, 2021
Today's Topic: Staying safe when high winds, hail, and tornadoes strike

When your area is under a tornado warning, or if you see a tornado approaching, you should seek shelter immediately! Most injuries associated with high winds are from flying debris, so remember to protect your head. The following are safety tips for seeking shelter during high winds and tornadoes.

If you are in a structure such as a residence, small building, school, nursing home, hospital, factory, shopping center, or high-rise building:

- Go to a pre-designated area such as a safe room, basement, storm cellar, or the lowest building level. If there is no basement, go to the center of a small interior room on the lowest level (such as a closet, bathroom, or interior hallway) away from corners, windows, doors, and outside walls. Put as many walls as possible between you and the outside. Get under a sturdy table and use your arms to protect your head and neck.
- In a high-rise building, go to a small interior room or hallway on the lowest floor possible. • Do not open windows.

If you are in a manufactured home or office:

- Get out immediately and go to a pre-identified location such as the lowest floor of a sturdy, nearby building or a storm shelter. Mobile homes, even if tied down, offer little protection from tornadoes.

If you are outside with no shelter available, there is no single research-based recommendation for what last-resort action to take, because many factors can affect your decision. Possible actions include:

- Immediately get into a vehicle, buckle your seat belt and try to drive to the closest sturdy shelter. If your vehicle is hit by flying debris while you are driving, pull over and park and cover your head with your arms and a blanket, coat or other cushion if possible.
- Lie in an area noticeably lower than the level of the roadway and cover your head with your arms and a blanket, coat or other cushion if possible.
- Do not get under an overpass or bridge. You are safer in a low, flat location. • Never try to outrun a tornado in urban or congested areas in a car or truck. Instead, leave the vehicle immediately for safe shelter.

The National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center has a web site devoted to tornado preparedness tips for school administrators. All school officials and administrators are encouraged to visit this web site to learn more about how they can prepare a tornado safety plan for their school. That web site is <http://www.spc.noaa.gov/faq/tornado/school.html>.

While hail and straight-line winds generally do not garner the same attention or respect as tornadoes, they can be just as deadly! Hail can exceed the size of softballs and fall at speeds of over 100 mph, seriously injuring or killing anyone in its path. Straight-line winds can topple trees onto cars, houses, and power lines. Many deaths from straight-line winds are the result of trees falling onto the person, whether they are outside, in their house, or driving in their car. Strong

straight-line wind events can even destroy buildings, especially mobile homes and manufactured homes.

When damaging straight-line thunderstorm winds or large hail is expected, the National Weather Service will issue a Severe Thunderstorm Warning. When a Severe Thunderstorm Warning is issued for your area, or when threatening thunderstorms approach your area, you should seek shelter immediately! To stay safe during high winds, the same safety rules that are used for tornadoes also apply during straight-line wind events, namely, you should seek shelter in an interior room on the lowest floor of a sturdy building or shelter, get away from windows, and get down low to protect yourself from possible flying debris and falling trees. During large hail situations, you should move indoors and stay away from windows. Wind-blown hail can shatter windows. If you are driving during a large hail episode, pull over into a parking lot or gas station and use blankets or coats to cover yourself in case the windshield shatters and hail enters the vehicle.

Be sure to take some time this week to learn more about severe weather safety. Learning and practicing severe weather safety when the weather is good will allow you to react more quickly when the weather turns bad. You can learn more about severe weather safety by visiting the North Carolina Department of Public Safety preparedness website at readync.org. This web page features an abundance of information, and links to a free cell phone app, that will help you plan and prepare for the severe weather season. Once again, that's readync.org.