

Fact Sheet



Preparing for Thunderstorms, Tornadoes, Flash Floods and Winter Storms

There are simple steps you can follow to stay safe during most types of severe weather:

1. Have an emergency kit ready for your home and your vehicle.
2. Consider buying a NOAA Weather Radio.
3. Be ready to evacuate if necessary.
4. Listen to weather updates and stay informed.
5. Keep away from windows and doors.

All communities are vulnerable to a variety of natural hazards from severe weather, including thunderstorms, flash flooding, snowstorms and tornadoes. It is important for you to understand the difference between a watch and a warning for severe weather.

- ✓ A severe storm watch means that severe weather may develop.
- ✓ A severe weather warning means a storm has developed and is on its way — take cover or seek safe shelter immediately.
- ✓ The safest place to ride out any storm is inside a secure building or well-built home.

Thunderstorm Safety Rules

- ✓ If you plan to be outdoors, check the latest weather forecast and keep a weather eye on the sky. The signs of an impending storm include: dark, thickening clouds; lightning; increasing wind; or darkening skies. Listen to your NOAA Weather Radio, AM/FM radio, or television for the latest weather information.
- ✓ When a thunderstorm threatens, get inside a home, a large building, or an automobile (not a convertible). Do not use the telephone except for emergencies.
- ✓ If you are caught outside, do not stand underneath a tall isolated tree or a telephone pole. Avoid projecting above the surrounding landscape. For example, don't stand on a hilltop.
- ✓ In a forest, seek shelter in a low area under a thick growth of small trees. In open areas, go to a low place, such as a ravine or valley.
- ✓ Get off or away from open water and other metal farm equipment or small metal vehicles, such as tractors, motorcycles, bicycles, golf carts, etc. Stay away from wire fences, clotheslines, metal pipes, and rails. If golfing, put down golf clubs and take off golf shoes. If you are in a group in the open, spread out, keeping people several yards apart.
- ✓ Remember, lightning may strike some miles from the parent cloud. Precautions should be taken even though the thunderstorm is not directly overhead. If you feel a tingling sensation, your hair stands on end or you hear buzzing, lightning may be about to strike you. Immediately crouch down, get on the balls of your feet and cover your ears. Do not lie flat on the ground.

Tornado Safety Rules

- ✓ Tornado Watch means conditions are favorable for tornadoes in or close to the watch area.
- ✓ Tornado Warning means a tornado has been detected by Doppler Radar and/or has been sighted.
- ✓ In homes, the basement offers the greatest safety. In homes without basements, take cover in the center part of the house, on the lowest floor, or in a small room such as a closet or bathroom. Seek shelter under sturdy furniture, if possible. Keep away from the windows.
- ✓ In shopping centers, go to a designated shelter area (not to your parked car).
- ✓ In office buildings, go to an interior hallway on the lowest floor or to the designated shelter area.
- ✓ In schools, follow advance plans to a designated shelter area, usually an interior hallway on the lowest floor. If the building is not of reinforced construction, go to a nearby one that is, or take cover outside on low, protected ground. Stay out of auditoriums, gymnasiums, and other structures with wide, free span roofs.
- ✓ In automobiles, leave your car and seek shelter in a nearby building, or lie flat in a nearby ditch or ravine.
- ✓ Mobile homes are particularly vulnerable and should be evacuated. Trailer parks should have a community storm shelter and a warden to monitor broadcasts throughout the severe storm emergency. If there is no shelter nearby, leave the trailer and take cover on low, protected ground.

Flash Flood Safety Rules

- ✓ Go to high ground immediately.
- ✓ Get out of areas subject to flooding. This includes dips, low spots, canyons, etc.
- ✓ Avoid already flooded and high velocity flow areas. Do not attempt to cross a flowing stream on foot where water is above your knees.
- ✓ Never drive through flooded areas or standing water. Shallow, swiftly flowing water can wash a car from a roadway. Also, the roadbed may not be intact under the water.
- ✓ If your vehicle stalls, abandon it immediately and seek higher ground. Rapidly rising water may engulf a vehicle and its occupants and sweep them away.
- ✓ Be especially cautious at night when it's harder to recognize flood dangers.
- ✓ Do not camp or park your vehicle along streams, particularly during threatening conditions.

Winter Storm Safety Rules

Plan ahead for winter storms at home.

- ✓ Stay inside. When using alternative heat from a fireplace, wood stove, space heater, etc., use fire safeguards and properly ventilate to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon monoxide gas is colorless and odorless.
- ✓ If you have no heat, close off unneeded rooms, stuff towels or rags in the cracks under doors, and cover windows at night.
- ✓ Eat and drink. Food provides the body with energy for producing its own heat. Keep the body replenished with fluids to prevent dehydration.
- ✓ Wear layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing. Remove layers to avoid overheating, perspiration and subsequent chill.

Plan ahead for winter travel.

- ✓ Keep your gas tank near full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.
- ✓ Let someone know your timetable and primary and alternate routes.

If caught in a vehicle:

- ✓ Stay in your car or truck as disorientation occurs quickly in wind-driven snow and cold.
- ✓ Run the motor about ten minutes each hour for heat. Open the window a little for fresh air to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked.
- ✓ Make yourself visible to rescuers. Turn on the dome light at night when running the engine. Tie a colored cloth (preferably red) to your antenna or door. Raise the hood to indicate trouble after snow stops falling.
- ✓ Exercise from time to time by vigorously moving arms, legs, fingers and toes to keep blood circulating and to keep warm.

Make a Winter Emergency Car Kit

- ✓ Water (Store in clean containers, one gallon of water per person per day, for a minimum of three days for drinking and sanitation purposes. If you live in a warm climate, more water may be necessary.)
- ✓ Blankets/sleeping bags
- ✓ High-calorie, non-perishable food and drinks
- ✓ Shovel
- ✓ Tow rope
- ✓ Flashlight with extra batteries
- ✓ Windshield scraper and brush
- ✓ Booster cables
- ✓ First-aid kit
- ✓ Extra clothing to keep dry
- ✓ Utility knife
- ✓ Sack of sand (or cat litter)
- ✓ Tool kit
- ✓ Compass and road maps
- ✓ Books, puzzles, games for children
- ✓ Extra prescription medication

Evacuating

There may be conditions in which you decide to leave on your own, or there may be situations when you are ordered to leave.

- ✓ Plan in advance how you will assemble your family and anticipate where you will go.
- ✓ Choose several destinations in different directions so you have options depending on the emergency.
- ✓ If you have a car, keep at least a half tank of gas in it at all times.
- ✓ Become familiar with alternate routes as well as other means of transportation out of your area. If you do not have a car, plan how you will leave if you have to.
- ✓ Take your emergency supply kit, unless you have reason to believe it has been contaminated.
- ✓ Lock the doors when you leave.
- ✓ Take pets with you if you are told to evacuate. However, if you are going to a public shelter, keep in mind that they may not be allowed inside.
- ✓ If you believe the air may be contaminated, drive with your windows and vents closed and keep the air conditioning and heater turned off.

For more information, visit: www.readypa.org

Additional resources: www.pema.state.pa.us, www.homelandsecurity.state.pa.us,
www.ready.gov or www.health.state.pa.us