

Tornadoes— Not Just in Kansas

Tornadoes occur throughout the world; but for some reason, they are mostly in the United States, specifically the Midwest.

You don't have to be resident of Greensburg, Kan., to know that tornadoes can be devastating—even when you have notice that they are coming. They are one of nature's

most awesome displays of power, and one you hope to never encounter. During any year, hundreds of tornadoes touch down causing millions of dollars in damage and claiming lives. A tornado is an extremely violent and destructive whirlwind that usually follows a northeast course. It extends down from a mass of dark clouds as a whirling funnel and moves over land in a narrow path. The winds of a tornado are among the most violent that occur on earth, reaching speeds of up to 300 mph. Tornadoes generally rotate counterclockwise in the northern hemisphere, and clockwise in the southern hemisphere.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, tornadoes generally last between 10 minutes and one hour, traveling distances of up to 20 miles. Tornadoes occur throughout the world; but for some reason, they are mostly in the United States, specifically the Midwest. While a tornado can occur at any time, spring and summer are the seasons in which most occur.

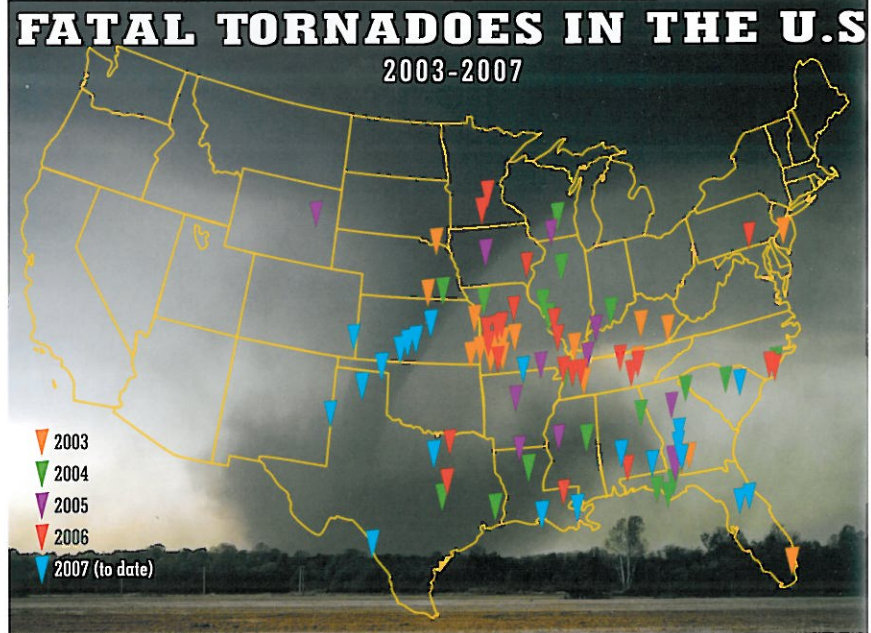
It is important to recognize the danger that is inherent in tornadoes. Many lives are lost each year because people fail to heed the warnings issued by the National Weather Service. When severe weather threatens, it is important to stay informed by paying attention to weather service alerts.

Tornado Facts ... Did you know?

According to the Tornado Project:

When a funnel forms over water, it is called a waterspout. When it forms over a desert, it's called a dustdevil. Neither is as strong as a tornado.

Tornadoes can occur in series (one after another) and more than one can form from the same cloud system. The worst series in history was on March 18, 1952, when 689 people were killed in Missouri, Illinois and Indiana.



- Not all scientists agree on how tornadoes form and maintain.
- Usually, tornadoes form between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m.
- Tornadoes can be invisible, but the skies are often described as dark green or black just before they arrive.
- The sound of a tornado is usually described like a jet or a freight train.
- Scientists cannot rate or know how strong a tornado is until after it is over.

Prepare for Tornadoes Before They Strike

The National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center (SPC) issues tornado watches when conditions are right for twisters in any part of the United States. If a tornado watch is issued for an area, it means that a tornado is possible. If a tornado warning is issued, it means that a tornado has been spotted, or is strongly indicated on radar, and it is time to go to a safe shelter immediately. Some communities have sirens that sound to alert the public of impending danger from a tornado. If damaging winds and hail are more likely than tornadoes, SPC issues severe thunderstorm watches for threatened areas. The public can check for activity by visiting www.hpc.ncep.noaa.gov. ▶▶

While most people put thought into staying safe when a tornado occurs at home, many do not consider what would happen if they are at work when severe weather strikes. Don't put your employees or your family in jeopardy by not having a plan. Devise a plan for your

office, and make sure everyone knows and understands it. Supervisors should inform employees of what steps to take when a tornado threatens while at work. It is important to have a drill so that you are sure everyone knows what to do in a tornado emergency.

Develop an Emergency Communication Plan

If family members are separated during a tornado—a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school—discuss a plan for getting back together after it is safe. Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the family contact. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address and phone number of the contact person.

Follow These Steps to Prepare for a Tornado:

- The Red Cross suggests assembling a disaster supplies kit, including a first aid kit, canned food and opener, battery powered weather radio, flashlight and extra batteries, necessary medicines, bottled water, sturdy shoes and work gloves, and written instructions on how to turn off electricity, gas and water if authorities advise such action.
- Keep a weather alert radio in the safety/security office at work, so someone can be aware of storm and tornado watches and warnings. Make it someone's responsibility to monitor the conditions and follow your company's policy for notification of others.
- Before tornado season, remind employees of a safe location once a warning has been issued. The area may be in the building's basement. If your building doesn't have a basement, a center hallway, bathroom or closet on the lowest floor where there are no windows are all good choices. Remember to keep this area uncluttered as you will likely only have a few minutes' notice of an impending tornado.
- Listen to the radio for instructions or warning cancellation so you know when it is safe to come out.

During a Tornado

When a tornado warning is issued, everyone should seek shelter immediately. Get under a piece of sturdy furniture, such as a work bench or heavy table or desk, and hold on to it. Crouch down and use your arms to protect your head and neck. If outdoors, get inside in a sturdy building.

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If shelter is not available, lie in a ditch or low-lying area, or crouch near a strong building and far away from trees or cars. If you are in a car, do not try to out-drive a tornado; tornadoes can change direction quickly and lift a car or truck in the air and destroy it. Avoid seeking shelter under bridges, which can create deadly traffic hazards while offering little protection against flying debris. Establish a company policy for those employees who are outside employees, so they know what to do in the field if a tornado is coming.

The following tips will help make the recovery effort easier, quicker and safer:

- Remain as calm as possible.
- Check yourself and those around you for injuries.
- Check utility lines and appliances for damages.
- Check for leaks, especially of fuels, gas



and toxic materials.

- Use a flashlight—not candles—to shut off main gas valves; have a professional turn it back on when it is safe to do so.
- Shut off electrical power at the control box.
- Observe any loose debris that could fall

(if there is any damage to building/house).

- Take pictures of your damaged property for insurance claims.

When a tornado is coming, you have only a short amount of time to make life-or-death decisions. Advanced planning and quick response are the keys to surviving a tornado.

Many of the risk management/safety principles addressed here in relationship to tornadoes also are valid for other forms of weather emergencies. To learn more about this or other risk management best practices for NTCA members, feel free to contact Telcom Insurance Group at 301-220-3200. ■

Marilyn Blake is risk manager for Telcom Insurance Group. She can be reached at mab@telcominsgrp.com.



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