

PUBLIC INFORMATION STATEMENT
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE RALEIGH NC
800 AM EDT WED MAR 02 2011

SEVERE WEATHER AWARENESS WEEK IN NORTH CAROLINA
FEBRUARY 27 - MARCH 05

Tornadoes are one of nature's most violent phenomena. The peak tornado season in North Carolina occurs in the months of March...April and May. However...tornadoes have touched down in all months. The largest number of tornado related fatalities occurs in March. Other months with high numbers of tornado related fatalities include May and November respectively.

...North Carolina Tornado History...

Violent tornadoes with winds in excess of 150 mph have struck the area as early as March and as late as November. The worst tornado outbreak in North Carolina history occurred in March of 1984 when several violent tornadoes with winds near 200 mph tracked from the town of Red Spring through Kenansville, Kinston, and Greenville. Late season tornado outbreaks occur in the fall as late as November as in the case of the Raleigh 1988 tornado and the deadly tornadoes three years ago which struck Kenly and Elm City.

Just last year, on the afternoon of March 28th a series of EF2 to EF3 tornadoes raced from near Charlotte to Lexington and High Point. In High Point alone a single EF3 tornado with winds over 130 mph damaged more than 600 homes, 40 of which were completely destroyed. In 2009, nearly two dozen tornadoes struck the state...8 of which were classified as strong to violent tornadoes rated EF2 and higher with winds in excess of 130 mph.

Tornadoes over the last two years have injured dozens of people...leaving families homeless and resulted in 28 million dollars in damages. A number of these tornadoes struck at night as everyone slept catching many individuals off guard despite warning lead times averaging 20 minutes. These night time monsters have a history of being particularly deadly in North Carolina.

...Tornado Dangers...

A study of tornadoes found that North Carolina was ranked first in the nation with the greatest percentage of people killed by night time tornadoes. Of all the tornado fatalities since 1950, eighty-two percent of tornado fatalities in North Carolina have occurred at night. Compare this with the fact that only about twenty-eight percent of all tornadoes actually touch down at night. A potential reason for the high night time fatality rates in comparison to high-risk areas like tornado alley could be the prevalence of night time tornadoes in March, May and November. The stronger tornadoes tend to strike during these months in the late evening to overnight hours.

Tornadoes also are difficult to visually identify at night by both the public and trained spotters. Even when warnings are provided at night, people asleep at home are less likely to hear those warnings. In addition, most housing ranging from mobile homes to brick homes where people eat...sleep and live are more vulnerable to tornadoes in comparison to safer locations such as schools and many businesses which are heavier buildings consisting of reinforced concrete. Whether at home or work remember when proper planning and action come together lives are saved.

...Tornado Safety...

Most tornado deaths and injuries across the state occur outdoors, in automobiles, and mobile homes. Nearly two thirds of all tornado fatalities occur in mobile homes and many of these at night. When a tornado warning is issued for your area or if you spot a tornado...seek shelter in a substantial building. The safest place is in an interior bathroom or closet. Put as many walls between you and the outside as possible. Stay away from windows as debris picked up by a tornado can easily shatter a window and enter your house.

If you are caught outdoors...seek shelter in a low spot like a ditch or culvert. You want to get as low as possible to protect yourself from the flying debris in a tornado. The debris within the tornado is what causes nearly all of the injuries and deaths. If in your car and threatened by a tornado...abandon your vehicle and seek shelter in a substantial structure or in a ditch. Never try to outrun a tornado in a vehicle. Tornadoes do not travel in straight lines and it can be very difficult to determine what direction the tornado is moving.

Also never seek shelter from a tornado under an overpass. There is no safe place under an overpass. In fact seeking shelter under an overpass puts you more at risk from violent winds and flying debris.

The National Weather Service will issue tornado watches when conditions are favorable for thunderstorms to produce tornadoes. Once a tornado is spotted or detected by radar...the National Weather Service will issue a tornado warning. Any time a tornado warning is issued for your area...take action to protect your life as well as the lives of your family. The action you take in the minutes and seconds before a tornado strikes is what save lives.

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Related Websites...

Thunderstorms and Tornadoes... http://www.srh.noaa.gov/jetstream//tstorms/tstorms_intro.htm

North Carolina tornado climatology... <http://www.spc.noaa.gov/climo/online/rda/RAX.html>

U.S. tornado climatology and past tracks... <http://www.spc.noaa.gov/wcm/>

SKYWARN... <http://www.erh.noaa.gov/rah/skywarn/>