

PUBLIC INFORMATION STATEMENT  
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE RALEIGH NC  
800 AM EDT WED MAR 04 2009

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TORNADO DRILL TODAY 930 AM  
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The annual Severe Weather Awareness Week tornado drill is today. At 930 am, National Weather Service offices all over the state of North Carolina will issue a test alert message over NOAA weather radio in the form of a Required Monthly Test. The drill is an opportunity for our schools, businesses, and residents to practice their tornado safety plans. For those without plans, this is the opportune time to sit down and develop a plan to protect you and your family.

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SEVERE WEATHER AWARENESS WEEK IN NORTH CAROLINA  
MARCH 01 - 09, 2009  
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Tornados are one of nature's most violent phenomena. Tornado season typically starts in Spring in the months of March...April and May. Tornadoes have touched down in the state in all months with the largest number of tornado related fatalities occurring in March. Other months with high numbers of tornado related fatalities include May and November. 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 tracked from the town of Red Spring through Kenansville, Kintson, Greenville and Snow Hill. Late season tornado outbreaks occur as late as November as in the case of the Raleigh 1988 tornado and the deadly tornadoes of last November which struck Kenly and Elm City.

Just last year, a number of deadly tornadic supercell thunderstorms struck the state resulting in as many as 10 strong to violent tornadoes rated on the Enhanced Fujita Scale as EF2 and higher with winds in excess of 130 mph. These tornadoes claimed 3 lives, injured dozens more and left many families homeless resulting in over 15 million dollars in damages. Many of these tornadoes also 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.

A recent study of tornadoes found that North Carolina was ranked first in the nation with the greatest percentage of killer night time tornadoes. Of all the tornado fatalities since 1950, eighty-two percent of tornado fatalities 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 significant reason for the area's high 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 three months.

Tornadoes are difficult to visually identify at night by both the public and trained spotters. Even when warnings are provided at night, the public is less likely to receive that warning at night due to normal sleeping patterns. In addition, residents have a tendency to be in more vulnerable housing and building structures (e.g., mobile or “manufactured” and single family homes) during the night in comparison to safer locations (e.g., school or place of work in steel or reinforced-concrete buildings) during the day. Whether at home or work remember when proper planning and action come together lives are saved.

In essence a tornado is a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground. Tornadoes can occur virtually any time of the year and any time of day or night. Most tornado deaths and injuries across the state have occurred outdoors, in automobiles, and mobile homes. 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 all of 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 and 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.

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