



How To Prepare Your Home For Severe Weather

A Reference Guide

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Spring has sprung. It's a great time to get outside and be outdoors enjoying the warm weather.

But with the arrival of spring comes the start of the severe weather season in most parts of the country. It's also a time to be alert and pay attention to rapidly changing weather conditions. Severe thunderstorms with lightning, heavy rain, hail, high winds and even tornadoes are possible during this time of year.

Here in the northeast we have started to see more severe weather that includes hail, damaging winds, tornadoes and lots of lightning. All thunderstorms produce lightning and all have the potential for significant danger.

In the United States, lightning kills 300 people and injures around 80 each year. Because of lightning's unpredictability to injury and destroy property, preparedness is crucial to minimizing harm. Lightning often strikes outside of heavy rain and may occur as far away as 10 miles ahead of or after the storm. Most deaths as a result of a lightning strike occur when people are caught outdoors and are unaware of the impending danger. The typical thunderstorm is 15 miles in diameter, and produces heavy rain anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes. They can occur singly, in clusters or lines.

Additionally, severe thunderstorms can produce tornadoes; Mother Nature's most violent weather event. They can appear without warning and can be invisible until dust and debris are picked up and swirled around or a funnel cloud appears.

Damage from severe weather can result in devastating damage to buildings, massive tree damage, downed wires, closed roads and sudden flooding. The aftermath of severe weather can last days, weeks and even months to towns or regions.

As with all disasters, preparedness, monitoring the media and common sense can minimize the danger to you and your family. This manual is designed to show you how to protect your home for severe weather and reduce those dangers to you and your family.

Before Severe Weather Strikes, Become Familiar with the Terms Forecasters Use To Identify Types of Severe Weather

Excessive Heat Watch/ Warning: Conditions are favorable for an excessive heat event in the next 24 to 72 hours. A warning is used for conditions posing a threat to life.

Heat Index: The apparent temperature when relative humidity is factored in with the actual air temperature. The National

Weather Service will initiate alert procedures when the Heat Index is expected to exceed 105°- 110°F.

Flash Flood: A flood which is caused by heavy or excessive rainfall in a short period of time, generally less than 6 hours. A dam failure can also cause a flash flood, depending on the type of dam and time period during which the break occurs.

Flash Flood Watch: Flash flooding is possible in and close to the watch area, but the occurrence is neither certain or imminent.

Listen to the National Weather Service, radio or television for information.

Flash Flood Warning: Flash flooding is in progress, imminent, or highly likely. Seek higher ground immediately or evacuate if directed to do so.

Severe Thunderstorm: A thunderstorm that produces a tornado, winds of at least 58 mph (50 knots), and/or hail at least $\frac{3}{4}$ " in diameter. Structural wind damage may imply the occurrence of a severe thunderstorm. A thunderstorm wind equal to or greater than 40 mph (35 knots) and/or hail of at least $\frac{1}{2}$ " is defined as approaching severe.

Severe Thunderstorm Watch: Tells you there is a possibility of severe thunderstorms in your area and they are likely to occur. Watch the sky and stay informed to know when warnings are issued.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning: A severe thunderstorm is occurring or will likely occur soon in your area. Warnings are for imminent danger to life and property to those in the path of the storm. Seek shelter immediately.

Tornado Watch: Tornadoes are possible in your area. Remain alert for approaching storms. Listen to the media for updates.

Tornado Warning: A tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. Take shelter immediately.

**Now that You Understand the Terms Used by Our Forecasters,
Here's What You Should Have On Hand At Home
In Case Severe Weather Strikes**

1. Bottled Water

Have at least a 3-day supply of water on-hand. A good rule of thumb is one gallon per person per day. This supply of water can be used not only for drinking but for sanitation purposes, too.

2. Food

Keep at least a 3-day supply of non-perishable food readily available. Think easy-to-prepare foods that require little or no prep work, such as canned fruits and vegetables, canned meats and soups. Energy bars, nuts, granola are also good choices.

3. Manual Can Opener

If you don't have power you'll need one to open your canned food.

4. Flashlight

Should you experience a power failure, a flashlight is a must. Have extra batteries on-hand.

4. First-aid kit

If you haven't already, purchased or create a first-aid kit find out what to include by visiting [The American Red Cross website](http://www.redcross.org) and learn what your first-aid kit should include. Check the kit regularly for expiration dates, and replace any used or out-of-date contents.

5. Battery-powered or Hand – Crank Radio

Even if you own a smart phone, you may lose power during a severe weather situation and will be unable to charge it. Because of this, it's important to have either a battery-powered or hand-crank radio (for listening to local emergency instructions) or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radio receiver (for listening to National Weather Service broadcasts).

6. Money in the Form of Cash

If electricity is down, ATM's and banks will have no way to give you money. Keeping cash on hand ensure you'll have funds if you need it.

7. Prescription Medications and Glasses

Consider buying a pill container and having an extra supply of medication available for emergencies.

8. Infant formula, Diapers and Food

Make sure you have the necessary food and water for infants and small children

9. Pet Food and Water

Pets are part of the family too, right? Make sure you can meet the needs of your pets in an emergency.

10. Cell Phones with Chargers, Inverter or Solar Charger

You'll want a way to connect with others if there is cell phone service up and running

Additional Items to Consider Having On Hand In Case of Severe Weather

- Whistle to signal for help
- Toilet paper
- Pocket knife
- Local maps
- Dust mask, to help filter contaminated air along with duct tape and plastic sheeting to shelter-in-place
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Important family documents such as copies of identification, passports, insurance policies, bank account records in a waterproof, portable container
- Sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person in your family. You might want extra bedding if you live in a cold-weather climate.
- Warm packs and camp heater.
- Change of clothing for each family member, which includes a long-sleeved shirt, long pants and sturdy shoes. You might want extra clothing if you live in a cold-weather climate.
- Water purification tablets

- Household bleach and medicine dropper - to use as disinfectant. Dilute nine parts water to one part bleach. To treat water in an emergency, use 16 drops of regular household liquid bleach per gallon of water. Do not use scented, color safe or bleaches with added cleaners.
- Fire Extinguisher
- Waterproof matches or regular matches kept in a waterproof container
- Long-Burning candles
- For your personal hygiene, feminine supplies and personal items
- Paper cups, plates and plastic utensils, paper towels, mess kits, paper and pencils
- Activities for children, such as books, games and puzzles

It doesn't take much to gather the supplies you need.

My suggestion is to grab a container and put all the items you'll need into it so that if you need to grab it and throw it in your car, everything will be in one place. Or possibly consider having a back pack for each member of your family and put the specific items each person will need into it. Store it in the front closet so if have to leave your home, you'll know you've got what you need for each family member. You can store gallons of water with your back packs too.

It doesn't really matter what system you develop, just develop one that you feel will work for your family. Remember to review the contents and update at least every six months so that you know all food is still good to eat and medications are safe to take.

Make Sure You Develop Your Plan

A few years ago, I had this nagging feeling we here in Massachusetts would experience a tornado. I don't know why I had this feeling, but I did. I started to think about what I would do if we had an alert for a tornado and how I would protect not only myself, but my elderly mother who suffers with dementia.

I thought about this for some time and came up with a plan of how I would get her into the basement and then protect her with cushions, blankets and how I would secure her so she wouldn't get sucked up in a funnel cloud, never to be seen again.

Some of my friends thought I was crazy, but lo and behold, several weeks later, we did indeed have a tornado in Massachusetts. Luckily it didn't strike my neck of the woods, but I've never forgotten my plan and last year when a tornado warning was issued for my part of the state, I had my plan in place and was ready to implement it.

Planning for these types of events ensures you know what you'll do if you are caught in a severe weather situation.

Here's some other things to consider:

First consider the types of disasters that are most likely to occur in your area. For example, I don't live in a flood area and it would be highly unlikely that my home would ever be threatened by flood waters. My daughter on the other hand does live in a flood area and has a plan for if her home where to flood. Make sure you evaluate the risk for where family members work and children's school areas.

Once you understand your risks, gather the family and develop your plan.

Emergency Planning: Your Family Evacuation Plan

Start with an evacuation plan for your home and then determine an evacuation route. Here's how:

- Draw up a floor plan with two escape routes for each room. Make sure children know the routes. If one route is out a window make sure you have an appropriate escape device to aid in leaving a second floor.
- Establish a place to meet outside the house and have alternate meeting places in the neighborhood.
- Have a full tank of gas, proper clothing, disaster supplies, important documents, and a supply of cash ready to go with you.
- If possible, secure your home as best you can.
- Make sure you have a map of your community with all emergency evacuation routes.

Emergency Planning: Family Communication

Being separated from your loved ones in an emergency situation can be upsetting and cause fear and panic. It's essential to include in your emergency planning communication protocols if you are separated from loved ones.

Here are some tips:

- Agree on an out-of-town contact in case local communications are down.
- Make a family contacts' card for each family member with contact information.
- Program "ICE" (In Case of Emergency) contacts in all of your cell phones.
- In an emergency, go to the Red Cross Website, where you can register yourself as safe and also search for family members.
- Sign up for community alert services that will send you instant text or e-mail alerts for local emergencies.

Determining If You Should Shelter At Home or Not

In most cases when severe weather strikes, staying at home and taking the necessary precautions will be the best choice possible for you and your family. Always follow the instructions given by emergency personnel. If you are asked to leave, follow the guidance of local fire and police.

During Severe Weather

1. Keep an eye on the sky. Look for darkening skies, flashes of light or increasing wind. Listen for the sound of thunder. If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck by lightning.
2. Blowing debris or the sound of an approaching tornado may alert you. Tornado danger signs included dark, almost greenish sky; large hail; a large, dark, low-lying cloud or a loud roar, similar to a freight train.

3. Heed shelter or evacuation requests made by officials or announcements on radio/television.
4. Gather family members, bring pets indoors and have your emergency supply kit ready. Stay indoors and limit travel to only absolutely necessary trips. Listen to radio/television for updates.
5. During a tornado warning, head indoors to a safe location. Basements, lower floors or interior hallways, bathrooms, closets, rooms are best for shelter.
6. If outdoors with nowhere to go during a tornado, lie flat in a ditch or low-lying area. Cover your head with your hands. Be aware of the potential of flooding. Watch out for flying debris. Never try to outrun a tornado.
7. Close outside doors and window blinds, shades or curtains. Stay away from doors, windows and exterior walls. Stay in the shelter location until the danger has passed.
8. During lightning, seek shelter indoors. Never leave a car during a lightning storm; cars are safe from the inside. Do not seek shelter under a tree; being underneath a tree is the second leading cause of lightning casualties.
9. Do not use wired telephones, touch electrical appliances or use running water. Cordless or cell phones are safe to use.
10. If outdoors, head for shelter indoors or inside a vehicle. If boating or swimming, get out of the water immediately and get indoors. Go to a low-lying place away from trees, poles or metal objects. Squat low to the ground. Make sure the place you pick does not flood.

11. Remember the 30/30 Lightning Safety Rule: Go indoors if, after seeing lightning, you cannot count to 30 before hearing thunder. Stay indoors for 30 minutes after hearing the last clap of thunder.
12. If it has been raining hard for several hours, or steadily raining for several days, be alert to the possibility of a flood.
13. Do not walk through flowing water. Drowning is the number one cause of flood deaths. Six inches of swiftly moving water can knock you off your feet.

Auto Safety Steps

Plan long trips carefully, listening to the radio or television for the latest weather forecasts and road conditions. If bad weather is forecast, drive only if absolutely necessary.

1. Keep your gas tank full in case evacuation is needed. Keep your vehicle maintained and in good working order.
2. Assemble an Emergency Car Kit including: flashlight with extra batteries, basic first-aid kit, necessary medications, pocket knife, booster cables, blanket/sleeping bag, extra clothes (including rain gear, gloves and socks), non-perishable foods, non-electric can opener, basic tool kit (pliers, wrench, screwdriver), tow rope, container of water and a brightly colored cloth to serve as a flag.
3. If in a car during a tornado, get out immediately and lay flat in a ditch or low-lying area. Do not get under an overpass or bridge.

Never try to outrun a tornado.

4. Do not drive through a flooded area. Six inches of water can cause a vehicle to lose control and possibly stall. A foot of water will float many vehicles. Cars, SUVs and pickup trucks can be swept away in just 2 feet of moving water. Do not drive around road barriers –they are there for a reason.
5. Be aware of areas where floodwaters have receded. Roads may have weakened and could collapse under the weight of a car.

After the Storm Has Passed

1. Stay off roads to allow emergency crews to clear roads and provide emergency assistance.
2. Help injured or trapped persons. Do not attempt to move seriously injured persons unless they are in immediate danger of death or further injury.
3. Use the telephone only for emergencies.
4. Use care around downed power lines. Assume a downed wire is a live wire. Report it to emergency authorities.
5. Watch out for overhead hazards such as broken tree limbs, wires and other debris. Be cautious walking around.
6. Be aware of children playing outdoors and in the streets, particularly climbing on or running around downed trees and wires. Parents should remind their children to stay away from these hazards.
7. Avoid walking into flood waters. The water may be contaminated by oil, gasoline or raw sewerage, contain downed power lines or animals.

8. Look for hazards such as broken/leaking gas lines, damaged sewage systems, flooded electrical circuits, submerged appliances and structural damage. Leave the area if you smell gas or chemical fumes.
9. Clean everything that gets wet. For food, medicines and cosmetics; when in doubt, throw it out.
10. Make sure backup generators are well ventilated. Never use grills, generators or camping stoves indoors.
11. Listen to media reports and/or local authorities about whether your community water supply is safe to drink and other instructions.
12. Make sure gutters and drains are clear for future rain/flood events.
13. Check on neighbors, particularly elderly or those who may require special assistance.
14. Take photographs/videos of damage as soon as possible. Contact your insurance company to file a claim.

Preparedness is not something that is static; it is ever changing.

Putting your plan in place will not only protect your family in the event of severe weather, but when other disasters strike.

Take the time to start putting your plan together so you can feel confident your family will have what it needs and be ready for anything life throws your way.

About The Author, Maureen Campaiola



After abusing credit cards and racking up over 50K in debt, I'm finally debt free. I'm a business owner, care taker to my mother, published writer, certified money specialist, mom and grandma. I love cats, the ocean, the month of October, green and brown, extra dirty martini's, cooking, bocce and saving money. I write about paying off debt, changing your mindset, mastering your home and learning to live contently with less. You'll find the resources you need to help you pay off your debt and grow in your understanding of money both financially and emotionally.

A Debt Free Stress Free Life

A Debt Free, Stress Free Life is a journal of stories, helpful information, resources, and humor all aimed at helping you find your ***Debt Free, Stress Free Life***. Rooted in the belief that the first step to a debt free life is acceptance to your current circumstances, you'll find new ways of living and to enjoy a simple but great life. Ultimately, what that means will be different for each and every one of you. For me it's a life rich in family, friends, freedom and fun. No matter what this means for you, I'm glad you're here.