

SEVERE WEATHER: BE AWARE AND PREPARE!

Ahh! Spring in the Midwest! The snow and ice are gone, the grass and trees are turning green, and the birds and blooms have returned for the warm weather. The change from winter to spring and summer not only brings new life and sunny days, but the chance of severe weather. Severe thunderstorms, lightning, hail, tornadoes, and flooding can cause a great deal of property damage and personal injury or death in this part of the country. Being aware of weather conditions and being prepared for disasters can minimize potential losses and help keep you and your families safe.

SEVERE THUNDERSTORMS

Only about 10 percent of thunderstorms are classified as severe. Severe thunderstorms produce hail that is at least an inch or larger in diameter, have winds of 58 miles per hour or higher, and/or produce a tornado. Thunderstorms can occur singly, or in lines or clusters of storms. Warm, humid conditions typically spawn thunderstorms. These storms can develop quickly; resulting in heavy rains, lightning, high winds, and hail.

Actions you can take before and during a severe thunderstorm to help reduce the chance of damage or injury include: removing dead or dying trees and branches that could fall in severe weather, store/secure lawn furniture, decorations, or toys that could be blown away or cause damage, get inside and stay away from doors and windows after closing blinds and curtains, unplug electrical devices, and stay away from computers, phones, plumbing, and concrete walls.

Local Emergency Government agencies will sound sirens, warning citizens of the approach of a severe thunderstorm when a Severe Thunderstorm Warning has been issued by the National Weather Service.

LIGHTNING

In the United States, lightning typically strikes about 25 million times per year, killing an average of 51 people and injuring hundreds more. Most lightning deaths occur when people are caught outdoors in the spring and summer months during the afternoon and evening hours.

A severe storm does not have to be present in your immediate area for lightning to strike where you are. Lightning can strike as far as ten miles from a storm and can occur without any warning. Staying in a solid structure or enclosed vehicle for at least 30 minutes after lightning has stopped is recommended by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Staying away from electronic devices, running water, metal plumbing, or concrete floors and walls will reduce the chances of being struck by lightning.

HAIL

Hail develops during severe thunderstorms when rain droplets freeze in the upper atmosphere, begin falling to earth, get pushed back up into the clouds by strong updraft winds, and gets larger when more water freezes to the ice pellet. This cycle continues until the ice pellet is heavy enough to overcome

the updraft and falls to earth as hail stones. The larger the hail stones, the stronger the updraft. The stronger the updraft, the more severe the storm.

Hail stones can reach the size of softballs and can reach speeds of over 100 miles per hours. Hail causes approximately \$1 billion in damages in the United States each year, and can cause injury and death either from the hail stones themselves or from glass and other debris produced due to hail strikes.

TORNADOES

Tornadoes are the most violent storms created in nature, producing winds that can exceed 300 miles per hour. Damage paths from tornadoes can be larger than one mile wide and over 50 miles long.

Tornadoes generally occur near the trailing edge of a severe thunderstorm, with winds dying down and little or no rainfall just prior to a tornado striking. Tornadoes aren't always visible. Many tornadoes become rain-wrapped, with heavy rain obscuring a funnel cloud. Newly forming tornadoes are hard to see, as they haven't picked up top soil and other debris that makes a funnel cloud visible.

Warning signs of an impending tornado include dark, often greenish-colored skies, large hail, a large, dark, low-lying cloud that may or may not be rotating, and a loud roaring noise that is often said to sound similar to a freight train.

In our area, severe thunderstorms and tornadoes usually occur in the late spring through the early summer between the hours of 3 pm and 9 pm, and generally move from the Southwest to the Northeast between 30 and 70 mph. The unpredictable nature of a tornadic thunderstorm, however, means people in the heartland should always be aware for changing weather conditions and take action to protect their homes and families.

If a Tornado Watch is issued it means that conditions are favorable for tornadoes to form. People should become even more vigilant, seek shelter, and monitor a weather radio, commercial radio, or television for more information and warnings.

The issuance of a Tornado Warning means that trained weather spotters have observed a funnel cloud and persons should seek sturdy shelter immediately. Shelter should be sought in a basement, storm shelter, or the lowest level of a building. Take cover under a table or other sturdy object and cover your head and neck with your arms.

If in a vehicle, fasten your seatbelt, close all windows, lock the doors, and if possible, cover your head and face with a blanket or jacket to protect you from flying glass and other debris. Do not park under an overpass or bridge, as winds and debris are funneled under them at speeds higher than that of the tornado itself.

If in the open, get in a low-lying area like a ditch and cover yourself with something if possible. Be conscious of flash flooding that may occur with thunderstorms. Do not seek shelter under a tree during a severe thunderstorm or tornado.

FLOODING

Most people do not realize that floods are the most common and costly natural disaster in the United States. Springtime is most flooding occurs, with runoff from snowmelt and spring rains causing creeks and rivers to overflow their banks.

Never drive or walk through flooded streets or across bridges. It only takes six inches of water to knock a person off of their feet, and only 12 inches of water to move any motor vehicle. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reports that most injuries and drowning during floods are due to people trying to walk or drive through flooded areas.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS/DISASTER PLANNING

Planning and preparedness is the best way to prevent property damage and injury. At a minimum, people should take three actions to prepare for natural disasters, including: Learning what natural disasters are most common in your area, creating an emergency supply kit for your home and car, and developing a family communication plan to alert family members of emergencies and give instructions as to what actions to take.

More information on disaster preparedness and how to create emergency plans and kits are available at www.ready.gov. To help employees be more prepared this season, handbooks and emergency supply list pamphlets are available at the front counter of the Police Department during normal business hours.

TORNADO AND SEVERE WEATHER AWARENESS WEEK

This week, Monday, April 17th, 2017 through Friday, April 21st, 2017, is National Tornado and Severe Weather Awareness Week. The National Weather Service, in conjunction with Wisconsin Emergency Management, has designated Thursday, April 20th, 2017 as the drill day for both tornado watches and tornado warnings. A Statewide Mock Tornado Watch will be issued at 1 pm, with Statewide Mock Tornado Warnings being issued at both 1:45 pm and 6:45 pm.

Citizens should listen for the sirens and understand the difference between the sounds of a tornado *watch* and a tornado *warning*. It should be noted that the Manitowoc County Joint Dispatch Center in conjunction with Manitowoc County Emergency Management tests the warning siren system by sounding a tornado warning every Saturday at noon.

Taking time to review emergency procedures, including evacuation routes and meeting points during these drills will help keep you and your fellow employees safe during this wild weather season.