

Tornadoes

Though tornadoes are not as common to the Shenandoah Valley as in the Midwest and Deep South, violent electrical storms accompanied by tornado type winds, hail, and flash flooding occur frequently from April through October. Many times, such storms will blow up with little or no warning on a hot, "sunny" late afternoon or early evening catching persons unaware with little opportunity to seek shelter. Tornadoes are rapidly spinning, funnel-shaped clouds extending from the base of a thundercloud to the earth, most frequent from spring to fall, noon to midnight, traveling from southwest to northeast, passing quickly.

Tornado Preparedness and Safety Tips

Know the Signs:

Strong, persistent rotation in the base of a cloud.

Whirling dust or debris on the ground under a cloud base – tornadoes sometimes have no visible funnel.

Hail or heavy rain followed by dead calm or a fast, intense wind shift. Many tornadoes, especially in Virginia, are wrapped in heavy precipitation and can't be seen.

Loud, continuous roar or rumble, which doesn't fade in a few seconds like thunder.

If it's night, look for small, bright, blue-green to white flashes at ground level (as opposed to silvery lightning up in the clouds). These lights are power lines being snapped by very strong wind, maybe a tornado.

Persistent lowering of the cloud base.

Loud, continuous roar or rumble, which doesn't fade in a few seconds like thunder.

If it's night, look for small, bright, blue-green to white flashes at ground level (as opposed to silvery lightning up in the clouds). These lights are power lines being snapped by very strong wind, maybe a tornado.

Persistent lowering of the cloud base.

Tornado Watches and Warnings:

It is important that you know the difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning, and pay attention to weather announcements during severe thunderstorms.

A **tornado watch** means that conditions are favorable for a tornado and that tornadoes are possible

A **tornado warning** means that a tornado has been sighted or has been indicated by National Weather Service Doppler radar and might be headed your way. When a warning is issued, [take cover immediately](#)

Develop a safety plan for you and your family for home, work, school and when outdoors. Make sure you practice the plan. Review the plan on days when severe weather is forecast for your area.

Pick a place where family members could gather if a tornado is headed your way. It could be your basement or, if there is no basement, a center hallway, bathroom or closet on the lowest floor. Keep this place uncluttered.

If you are in a high-rise building, you may not have enough time to go to the lowest floor. Pick a place in a hallway in the center of the building.

Be prepared

Assemble a Tornado Safety Kit containing:

- First aid kit and essential medications
- Battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries
- Canned food and manual can opener
- Bottled water
- Sturdy shoes and work gloves

Also include in the kit written instructions on how to turn off your home's utilities.

Have a [NOAA Weather Radio](#) with a warning alarm tone and battery backup to receive updated forecasts and critical information such as watches and warnings.

Keep a Virginia map handy to help you follow the movement of threatening storms from weather bulletins.

Know What to Do

Stay tuned to your local radio or TV for weather reports, or listen to a NOAA weather radio for more detailed information when weather conditions are favorable for the formation of tornadoes.

When a tornado watch is issued: Tornadoes could develop in your area.

- Stay tuned to your local radio, TV or NOAA weather radio for further information and possible warnings.

- Be prepared to take cover if necessary.

When a tornado warning is issued: A tornado has been sighted or has been indicated by NWS Doppler radar.

- Warnings are given to individual counties or cities and include the tornado's location, direction and speed.

- If you are in or near its path, seek shelter immediately.

If a Tornado is Headed Your Way

Find shelter immediately in the nearest substantial building. Go to the building's basement. If there is no basement, move to a small, windowless interior room such as a closet, bathroom or interior hall on the lowest level of the building. Be sure to use the stairs to reach the lowest level, not an elevator. Protect your body from flying debris with a heavy blanket or pillows.

If in a campus building listen to instructions from the building coordinators, lie under heavy furniture, stay against inside walls in center hallways or go to corner of basement. If you have time prior to arrival of funnel open a few windows on the northeast side of building to equalize the pressure if requested.

Take precautions if you cannot get to substantial buildings. If you are in:

Open buildings (shopping malls, gymnasiums or civic centers): Try to get into the restroom or an interior hallway. If there is no time to go anywhere else, seek shelter right where you are. Try to get up against something that will support or deflect falling debris. Protect your head by covering it with your arms.

Automobiles: Get out of your vehicle and try to find shelter inside a sturdy building. A culvert or ditch can provide shelter if a substantial building is not nearby — lie down flat and cover your head with your hands. Do not take shelter under a highway overpass or bridge, because debris could get blown under them or the structures themselves could be destroyed.

Outdoors: Try to find shelter immediately in the nearest substantial building. If no buildings are close, lie down flat in a ditch or depression and cover your head with your hands.

Mobile homes: Do not stay in mobile homes. You should leave immediately and seek shelter inside a nearby sturdy building or lie down in a ditch away from your home, covering your head with your hands. Mobile homes are extremely unsafe during tornadoes

Information compiled from the Virginia Department of Emergency Management
<http://www.vaemergency.com/>