Storm Season

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Storm Season
This past week we know we are in Kansas, especially when it comes to the weather. So far, we have had wind, rain, hail, sleet, snow, and then the warm beautiful spring days. I believe there is a saying that goes, “If you don't like the weather, wait 15 minutes and it'll change.” Even if you have lived in Kansas all of your life, it is important to review the terminology used during a severe weather event.

A Tornado Watch means that conditions are favorable for the development of severe thunderstorms, including the possibility of tornadoes. Tornado Watches are typically issued over a large area and can be issued several hours before thunderstorms even form. A Tornado Watch should prompt you to pay very close attention to the weather during a particular time period.

A Tornado Warning means that either a tornado has been spotted or the development of a tornado either appears imminent through reports from storm spotters or based on evidence from Doppler radar. A Tornado Warning is typically issued for a specific storm and therefore covers a relatively small area and shorter time frame. Tornado Warnings provide short-term notice to individuals in the direct path of a storm. A Tornado Warning should prompt you to take immediate action to seek shelter.

While it can sometimes seem like tornado warnings come and go without anything bad happening, it only takes one storm to drastically alter a community and put lives at risk. Having a plan before a storm appear, or a tornado warning is issued, is essential to protect your life.

Warning reception: How will you receive tornado warning information? Because of our current technology, it is easier than ever to receive tornado warning information directly. This can come in the form of a call, text, weather radio, smart phone alerts, and through traditional media like TV or radio and local sirens. Outdoor warning sirens — sometime called storm sirens — also play an important role for individuals who may be outside when a storm approaches.

Shelter location: Where will you go when a warning is issued? The general rule of thumb for tornado sheltering is to get to the lowest level possible and to put as many walls between you and the outside as you can. If your building has a basement, that will be the safest location. If there is no basement, finding an interior room with no windows typically provides the safest location.

Shelter supplies: What additional supplies can make a difference when sheltering from a tornado? A few simple items can make a big difference in keeping you safe when sheltering from a tornado. Ideally, you want to try to protect your head, eyes, body and feet. This means putting on a bike helmet or hardhat, safety goggles or lab glasses, a heavy winter coat, and sturdy, closed toed shoes, can all decrease your risk of injury from flying debris. Keeping these items in a go-bag, or in a kit at your shelter location, is a good idea so that you don’t have to try to find things as a storm approaches.

In a vehicle: To put it simply, being in a vehicle is one of the most dangerous places to be in a tornado. If a tornado warning is issued while you are driving, the safest thing to do is to drive to the closest sturdy shelter. If that is not an option, either park safely on the side of the road, get down in your car, and cover your head, or abandon your car and seek shelter in a low-lying area such as a ditch or ravine. Never park or seek shelter under a highway overpass. Please note that THESE ARE ALL BAD OPTIONS. If possible, by following along with the forecast, try to avoid being on the road at all if tornadoes are possible.

After the storm: Be aware that other hazards may exist after a storm passes. Power lines may be down, debris and broken glass may exist, flooding of roadways may occur, or other storms
may be coming. While there may be a temptation to drive around to view damage, if you are safe, and in a safe location, it is typically best to stay put to allow first responders to be able to access areas needing assistance. We are beginning the Severe Storm season, now is the time to get prepared.

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