

RISK MANAGEMENT BULLETIN

Best Practices

Tornadoes



Tornadoes

Tornadoes form suddenly, are often preceded by warm, humid weather, and are always produced by thunderstorms. Tornado season extends from April to September with peak months in June and July, but they can occur at any time of year. Be aware of the hazards and know what to do when a severe summer storm threatens your area. The following information will help schools to be better prepared for the possible development of tornadoes.

Tornado Watches and Warnings

A ***tornado watch*** is issued by Environment Canada when tornadoes are possible in your area. Remain alert for approaching storms. This is the time to remind staff members where the safest places within your school are located, and listen to the radio or television for further developments.

A ***tornado warning*** is issued when a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. If a tornado warning is issued for your area and the sky becomes threatening, move to your pre-designated place of safety. Turn on a battery-operated radio and wait for further instructions.

Tornado Danger Signs

Look out for:

- Dark, often greenish sky
- Wall cloud
- Large hail
- Loud roar; similar to a freight train

Caution:

- Some tornadoes appear as a visible funnel extending only partially to the ground. Look for signs of debris below the visible funnel.
- Some tornadoes are clearly visible, while others are obscured by rain or nearby low-hanging clouds.
- Before a tornado hits, the wind may die down and the air may become very still.
- An approaching cloud of debris can mark the location of a tornado even if a funnel is not visible.
- Tornadoes generally occur near the trailing edge of a thunderstorm. It is not uncommon to see clear, sunlit skies behind a tornado.

Designate areas in the school as shelter areas and practice having everyone go there in response to a tornado threat. Recognize that hydro may be out and have a whistle available in case the PA or alarm bells cannot function.

At School

- Go to the basement or to an inside hallway at the lowest level. Change rooms and washrooms are ideal places in most schools. Stay away from large glass areas.
- Avoid places with wide-span roofs such as auditoriums and cafeterias.
- Get under a piece of sturdy furniture such as a workbench or heavy table or desk and hold on to it.
- **Use arms to protect head and neck.**

If Outdoors

- If possible, get inside a building.
- If shelter is not available or there is no time to get indoors, lie in a ditch or low-lying area or crouch near a strong building. Be aware of the potential for flooding.
- Use arms to protect head and neck.

If in a Car

- *Never* try to outride a tornado in a car or truck. Tornadoes can change direction quickly and can lift up a car or truck and toss it through the air.
- Get out of the car immediately and take shelter in a nearby building.
- **If there is no time to get indoors, get out of the car and lie in a ditch or low-lying area away from the vehicle. Be aware of the potential for flooding.**

Remember – Manitoba has tornadoes every year and the entire province has at some time experienced a tornado.

When a tornado is coming, you have only a short amount of time to make life or death decisions. Advance planning and quick response are the keys to surviving a tornado.