



TORNADOES . . .

Tornado warnings include media, sirens

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Several warning systems are in place to ensure Norton County residents are aware of an approaching tornado, including sirens, the reverse 911 system and radio and tv announcements.

Norton County Sheriff Troy Thomson said the warning systems are designed to catch the most people. He said sirens are meant to be heard if residents are outside, while the tv or radio can be monitored from inside a home.

"They (the sirens) are an outdoor warning device," he said.

People can also receive emergency alerts on the reverse 911 system, if they have registered. Registration can be done online, at <https://login.coderedweb.com/codereddataentry/index.cfm?Groupid=1370>

The reverse 911 system calls registered phone numbers several times to warn people about emergencies, such as tornados.

Thomson said the warning systems cannot reach everyone, but people need to be proactive and monitor warnings themselves.

"You have to take some responsibility," he said.

Environmental signs can also be monitored, in addition to the conventional methods.

According to the National Weather Service, signs of an approaching tornado include:

- Strong, persistent rotation in the cloud base.

- Whirling dust or debris on the ground under a cloud base -- tornados sometimes have no funnel!

- Hail or heavy rain followed by either dead calm or a fast, intense wind shift.

Many tornados are wrapped in heavy precipitation and can't be seen.

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

- Night - Small, bright, blue-green to white flashes at ground level near a thunderstorm (as opposed to silvery lightning up in the clouds). These mean power lines are being snapped by very strong wind, maybe a tornado.

- Night - Persistent lowering from the cloud base, illuminated or silhouetted by lightning -- especially if it is on the ground or there is a blue-green-white power flash underneath.

FAMILY DISASTER PLAN

Families should be prepared for all hazards that affect their area. NOAA's National Weather Service, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the American Red Cross urge each family to develop a family disaster plan.

Where will your family be when disaster strikes? They could be anywhere -- at work, at school, or in the car. How will you find each other? Will you know if your children are safe? Disasters may force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. What would you do if basic services -- water, gas, electricity or telephones -- were cut off?

Follow these basic steps to develop a family disaster plan...

I. Gather information about hazards. Contact your local National Weather Service office, emergency management or civil defense office, and American Red Cross chapter. Find out what type of disasters could occur and how you should respond. Learn your community's warning signals and evacuation plans.

II. Meet with your family to create a plan. Discuss the information you have gathered. Pick two places to meet: a spot outside your home for an emergency, such as fire, and a place away from your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Choose an out-of-state friend as your "family check-in contact" for everyone to call if the family gets separated. Discuss what you would do if advised to evacuate.

III. Implement your plan. (1) Post emergency telephone numbers by phones; (2) Install safety features in your house, such as smoke detectors and fire extinguishers; (3) Inspect your home for potential hazards (such as items that can move, fall, break, or catch fire) and correct them; (4) Have your family learn basic safety measures, such as CPR and first aid; how to use a fire extinguisher; and how and when to turn off water, gas, and electricity in your home; (5) Teach children how and when to call 911 or your local Emergency Medical Services number; (6) Keep enough supplies in your home to meet your needs for at least three days. Assemble a disaster supplies kit with items you may need in case of an evacuation. Store these supplies in sturdy, easy-to-carry containers, such as backpacks or duffle bags. Keep important family documents in a waterproof container. Keep a smaller disaster supplies kit in the trunk of your car.

A DISASTER SUPPLIES KIT SHOULD INCLUDE:

A 3-day supply of water (one gallon per person per day) and food that won't spoil • one change of clothing and footwear per person • one blanket or sleeping bag per person • a first-aid kit, including prescription medicines • emergency tools, including a battery-powered NOAA Weather Radio and a portable radio, flashlight, and plenty of extra batteries • an extra set of car keys and a credit card or cash • special items for infant, elderly, or disabled family members.

IV. Practice and maintain your plan. Ask questions to make sure your family remembers meeting places, phone numbers, and safety rules. Conduct drills. Test your smoke detectors monthly and change the batteries at least once a year. Test and recharge your fire extinguisher(s) according to manufacturer's instructions. Replace stored water and food every six months.

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