



## COLUMBUS FIRE DEPARTMENT

1101 JACKSON STREET  
COLUMBUS, INDIANA 47201

HOME OF THE FIRST DIESEL  
FIRE ENGINE  
IN 1939

812-376-2679  
Fax 376-2568

KRISTEN BROWN, MAYOR

JOEL M. THACKER, FIRE CHIEF

### City of Columbus – Tornado Guidelines

#### What does a Warning Siren Mean?

Under the city of Columbus' new policy, **effective immediately**, tornado warning sirens will be activated for the following conditions only:

1. When a Tornado Warning has been issued for Bartholomew County by the National Weather Service.
2. When a Public Safety Officer (Police, Fire, EMS) reports the sighting of a funnel cloud or tornado.
3. When directed to activate the sirens by the Director of the Emergency Operations 911 Center or Director of the Emergency Management Office.

#### Prepare for a Tornado:

##### 1. Make a Plan:

- **You need to have a plan** for wherever you may be when a tornado strikes - at home, at school, at work, on the road or in a public building.
- **Practice it at least twice a year** – make sure everyone in your household knows what they need to do and where to go in case of a tornado.
- **Your goal should be to:**
  - Get as low as possible - completely underground is best.
  - Put as many barriers between you and the outside as possible

## **What to do when you hear a Warning Siren:**

1. **Take action immediately!** Under the new city policy, a warning siren means that a tornado has been spotted, the National Weather service has issued a tornado warning, or local officials have reason to believe there is a potential for a tornado.

- **Storm Cellars and Basements**

- A basement is also a good shelter in most cases. If your basement is not totally underground, or has outside doors or windows, stay as far away from them as possible. Items from above could fall into the basement, so it's a good idea to get under a stairwell or a piece of sturdy furniture. If possible, avoid seeking shelter underneath heavy objects on the floor above. Use coverings (pillows, blankets, sleeping bags, coats, etc.) and helmets to shield your head and body and to protect yourself from flying debris.

- **If No Underground Shelter is Available:**

- Get as close to the ground as possible
- Get as far inside the building as possible
- Get away from doors, windows and outside walls
- Get in as small a room as possible

- **Apartments**

- The basic tornado safety guidelines apply if you live in an apartment. Get to the lowest floor, with as many walls between you and the outside as possible.
- Apartment dwellers should have a plan, particularly if you live on the upper floors. If your complex does not have a reinforced shelter, you should make arrangements to get to an apartment on the lowest floor possible.
- In some cases, the apartment clubhouse or laundry room may be used as a shelter, provided the basic safety guidelines are followed. You need to have a shelter area that's accessible at all times of the day or night.

○ **Mobile Homes**

- Even an EF-1 tornado, typically considered a "weak tornado", will most likely severely damage a mobile home and/or roll it over. This is why tornado safety plans are so crucial for residents of mobile homes!
- Mobile homes are especially susceptible to high winds/tornadoes. You will likely not be safe in a mobile home, whether you're in a hallway, a closet or a bathroom. Mobile homes cannot stand up to even a weak tornado, and you should make plans BEFORE the storm arrives to get to a safe shelter. Due to the potentially short amount of time between a warning and the arrival of a tornado, people should consider executing their safety plans when a tornado watch is issued- Do not wait for the tornado warning!
- Taking cover under sturdy furniture, in a bathtub or closet or under a mattress will be meaningless in a mobile home if the home itself is destroyed, blown over, or rolled over by a tornado. Get out of mobile homes and find a more substantial shelter as quickly as possible, one that is available at any time of day or night.

○ **Hotels and Motels**

- Think about tornado safety in hotels, motels. Some lodging establishments have safety plans for guests, but others may not, and you may be on your own. Avoid open hallways - hallways that have doors and/or windows on either end. These can become wind tunnels and send debris flying down the corridor. Interior bathrooms and closets near the center of the building may be good shelters in this situation. Again, wherever you are forced to seek shelter in a tornado, cover up with pillows, heavy blankets or whatever you can find.

○ **Public Buildings - Malls, Stores, Restaurants, Hospitals**

- The same basic tornado safety guidelines apply in any public building, whether it's your local shopping mall, a hospital or nursing home, a grocery or discount store, a church, a hotel, convenience store, truck stop or restaurant.
- **GET IN** - put as many walls between you and the outside as possible
- **GET DOWN** - if you can't get underground, get as low as possible
- **COVER UP** - use whatever you have to protect your head and body from flying missiles

- **Vehicles**

- Cars, trucks, sport utility vehicles, RVs, 18-wheelers, boats, trains, planes, etc. - are terrible places to be when a tornado threatens. Fortunately, these situations can be avoided most of the time by being ALERT to the possibility of severe storms and tornadoes.
- If trapped on the roadway by an impending tornado, leave your vehicle and find a ditch or culvert. Stay as low as possible and cover yourself as best as possible.

- **Outdoor Activities - Campgrounds, RV Parks, Sporting Events, Fairs, Festivals**

- Being exposed outdoors is one of the worst places to be in a tornado. Being involved in outdoor activities can sometimes put you at increased risk, because you're exposed outdoors and possibly in an unfamiliar area.
- Organized outdoor events, including sporting events at all times of year, should have weather safety plans. People at large sporting events are especially vulnerable because of the difficulties involved in moving large numbers of people. Event coordinators or managers should have a detailed severe weather safety plan in place and practice it. People at large outdoor gatherings or events should listen when severe weather information is conveyed and follow instructions if a safety plan is put into action.

- **When to Leave a Shelter**

- Listen to local radio or television stations before deciding when to leave your shelter. Local stations will give you information when the National Weather Service has given an all-clear sign.

## Develop a Tornado Safety Kit

The following items would be extremely useful to have in your storm shelter, or to take with you to your storm shelter, when a tornado occurs:

- **Disaster Supply Kit** - You should store your emergency supplies as close to your shelter as possible.
- **Fresh water and food** for three days.
- **Battery Operated Weather Radio** - You will want to be able to monitor the latest information directly from your National Weather Service.
- **A Map to Track Storms** - You will need to be able to track the progress of the storm. Since warning texts include county names, a county outline map of your area is a great thing to keep handy. You might also keep a state highway map, which includes most of the cities and towns referred to in NWS warnings and statements.
- **Battery Operated TV and/or Radio** - This will allow you to monitor news and severe weather information. Radios that offer TV audio can be helpful. Also, many TV stations simulcast their broadcasts on AM or FM radio stations.
- **Shoes** - This will be very important if your home is damaged and you must walk across broken glass or other debris!
- **Identification** - You may need identification to move around in the area should significant damage occur.
- **Vehicle Keys** - If your vehicle is drivable, you will need the keys to be able to use it. It's a good idea to keep an extra set in your shelter area.
- **Cell Phone** - If there is phone service, you will certainly want your phone. However, remember that cell phone service may be interrupted after a tornado or other disaster!