



EXTENSION

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Storm Safety While on the Road

When at home during stormy weather, Oklahomans understand all too well the importance of paying attention to news media updates and the family plan to head to a safe location when tornado sirens sound.

Knowing what to do on the road is a different matter, however. Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Extension Housing and Consumer Specialist, said drivers cannot outrun danger. “Seeking a safe place to shelter is of utmost importance if you are not at home,” Peek said. “If you are driving your vehicle, it’s imperative to find a place to shelter immediately. No vehicle, no matter how big, is a match for the fierceness of an Oklahoma tornado. Vehicles can be picked up and tossed like toys and people can be seriously injured or lose their lives.”

Thanks to advances in technology, weather reporting services typically can give a good amount of advance notice of impending storms. Regional media often has the most detailed information for surrounding communities, so it’s important to be aware of location markers such as highway numbers and town names.

“If you’re in your car, tune in to a local radio station. The weather service will interrupt regular programming to provide storm updates,” she said. “Radio announcers will be using town and county names, as well as names of various highways and streets, as they provide information regarding the location of a tornado.”

Another way to keep track of storms is through local news stations’ apps on smart phones. However, drivers should not create additional road hazards – find a safe place to pull over before using a phone or have a passenger get the latest weather information. Some smartphone apps use GPS chips to pull up the latest radar imagery for the traveler’s specific location.

If the tornado is far enough away and road options and traffic allow, drivers should try to find a substantial building for shelter and adapt the basic elements of their home plan: get in, get down and cover up. Businesses such as convenience stores and truck stops can be good sources of shelter. As always, take cover in an interior room.

“You should never try to outrun a tornado when you’re in a vehicle. If you are out and caught in extreme wind and there is nowhere to shelter, park the car as safely as possible. Stay in the car, keep your seatbelt on, get your head below window level and cover up, if possible,” she said.

Highway overpasses and bridges are not good options for shelter. As the winds from a tornado channel under such a structure, they actually speed up and increase the chances of getting blown out from under the overpass or hit by flying debris.

We are in the heart of tornado season in Oklahoma and knowing what safety precautions to take while on the road could save your life.

For additional information, contact Kristy Spalding, Beckham and Washita Counties’ FCS Extension Educator, at 580-832-3356 or kristy.spalding@okstate.edu.

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