



## EXTENSION

# TIPS TO PREPARE FOR SPRING STORM SEASON

If there is one thing Oklahomans know about, it is the importance of being prepared for storm season. While we can experience storms throughout the year, springtime is when things start to ramp up.

We all are familiar with the sounds that emit from the television when the local weather persons break in with emergency notifications. They may talk about a storm watch or a storm warning, but what is the difference?

Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Extension housing and consumer specialist, said the National Weather Service will issue tornado alerts when weather conditions occur that make tornadoes more likely.

"A tornado watch is when the weather conditions in an area indicate an increased risk for severe weather that may be capable of producing a tornado," Peek said. "The NWS will issue a tornado warning when a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. On average, tornado warnings are issued 13 minutes prior to the event, but the warning times can vary greatly and could be much less."

It is important to be informed regarding storms in your area. Receiving timely information about weather conditions via television news broadcasts, radio or updates through a smart phone can have a direct impact on knowing when to take action. Many communities have text or email alerting systems for emergency notifications. To find out what alerts are available in your area, do an Internet search with your town, city or county name and the word alerts.

Peek also said it is a good idea to have a weather radio in your home. This type of radio receives broadcast alerts directly from the National Weather Service.

"Something else to keep in mind is how you'll receive information in the event of a power outage. Have extra batteries available for the radio," she said. "Keep your cell phone charged and if possible, have a portable phone charger available."

Having a safe place to go should be top priority for you and your family. When a storm hits is not the time to try to figure out the safest place to go. Peek said your level of protection from tornadoes depends on where you are when the tornado strikes. Other considerations are the size, strength and duration of the tornado. Also, know how you will get to your safety location. Do you have a storm shelter at your home? Does your community have a public shelter? If not, locate the nearest safe place. This is the type of thing you must know in advance.

"Develop a safety plan for everyone in the house. Each person has different needs, so plan accordingly," she said. "Young children, elderly family members or those with disabilities all need to be included in the plan. Practice the plan to ensure everyone knows what will happen in the event of a storm."

Peek said every household should have an emergency kit ready for storm season. It is a good idea to keep an emergency kit in your vehicle and your place of work. It should include things you would need most when you come out of your shelter following the storm. Remember, your home could be damaged, the electricity is probably out and there is a possibility of no water.

Extra batteries, bottled water, a first aid kit for minor injuries, a change of clothing, leather gloves, sturdy shoes, nonperishable foods, medications and pet food. A whistle or air horn can be useful in the event you are trapped in your shelter. This will help rescue crews find you. A full list of supplies is available at [www.ready.gov/build-a-kit](http://www.ready.gov/build-a-kit).

"In addition to these supplies, make sure you have copies handy of your homeowner's or renter's insurance policy. Before storm season hits, consider scanning important documents and storing them on a flash drive that can be kept with your emergency supplies," Peek said. "For those with children, keep in the kit a special item such as a stuffed animal, a book or a game that can help provide comfort while you're in the shelter and afterward."

Put your supplies in a backpack, a small tote or some other container that's easy to grab and carry. It is in the interest of your safety and the safety of your family to be prepared for storm season.

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