

TORNADOES

Tornadoes are violently rotating columns of air that descend from thunderstorm clouds and make contact with the ground. They typically develop when the right atmospheric ingredients come together, including warm, moist, unstable air near the surface; cooler, dry air aloft; and strong, atmospheric winds, increasing with height. All thunderstorms can produce tornadoes, but they are most likely to develop within supercells.



Courtesy of Kenny Griffin
Marshall County, Apr 10, 2009

In Alabama, most tornadoes occur during two peak severe weather seasons. The spring severe weather season spans March, April, and May. The fall severe weather season includes November and early December. Tornadoes typically develop during the warmest part of the day, but are possible any hour of the day or night, and during any month of the year (see graphs on page 17). Alabamians are encouraged to be prepared when there is any potential for tornadoes.

Tornadoes come in different sizes, from narrow rope-like swirls to large wedge-like funnels. They have wind speeds that vary from as little as 65 mph to speeds over 200 mph and move with the thunderstorms that produce them, with forward speeds ranging from nearly stationary to 70 mph. Most tornadoes travel from the southwest toward the northeast. In Alabama, tornadoes are often rain-wrapped and hidden or obscured by terrain. This makes them more dangerous.

Remember, tornadoes form quickly! You may have only a few seconds to react and find shelter. When a tornado threatens, your immediate actions can save your life! Know what to do and where to go! Be Calm, Smart, and Safe.

TORNADO SAFETY

IN HOMES OR SMALL BUILDINGS:

Go to a pre-determined shelter, such as a basement. Get under something sturdy like a heavy table, if available. Protect yourself from flying debris with pillows, heavy coats, blankets, or quilts. Use bicycle or motorcycle helmets to protect your head.

If an underground shelter is not available, go to a small interior room, such as a closet, bathroom, or interior hallway, on the lowest level. Put as many walls between you and the outside as possible. Stay away from windows and doors.



Courtesy of Shelby County EMA



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IN MOBILE HOMES:

Leave well in advance of approaching severe weather and go to a strong building. If there is no shelter nearby, get into the nearest ditch, depression, or underground culvert and lie flat with your hands shielding your head.

IN PUBLIC BUILDINGS:

Go to the best available, predesignated, protective area. Basements are best, but interior locations on the lowest level also offer protection. Stay away from windows and other hazards inherent to the building.