

Drill It

State of Michigan law now requires all public schools to conduct a minimum of two tornado safety drills per school year.



The Michigan Committee for Severe Weather Awareness recommends that schools conduct at least one tornado drill in the fall and one in the spring.

Severe weather in Michigan doesn't follow a calendar, and certainly is not restricted to just warm summer months: Michigan severe weather outbreaks occur virtually every spring and fall, and even during the month of January. All schools should have a tornado safety plan that includes efficiently moving people to designated safe areas in the building (addressing both during school and after school activities), as well as a backup method for communication should the power fail and the school's public address system becomes inoperable.

Michigan Committee for Severe Weather Awareness

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Designated Spotters

Have several school staff members designated as "spotters" and a designated coordinator, with a backup, authorized to activate safety plans. The spotter can serve as the last line of defense in a school's weather emergency safety plan. Contact your local emergency manager or NOAA National Weather Service to find out about training sessions in your area. The following information is not a substitute for official training.

Know the Terminology

A tornado watch is issued when the possibility of tornadoes exists.

A tornado warning is issued when a tornado has been spotted or indicated on radar.

Have a NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards with a warning alarm tone in order to receive severe weather information directly from NOAA National Weather Service.

Upon receiving notification of a tornado watch, the principal/coordinator should alert staff members. During a tornado watch, specific teachers or other school staff members should be designated to monitor commercial radio or television for tornado warnings, even if the school has a NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards tone-alert system.

Remember: Severe thunderstorms may produce as much damage as some tornadoes.

Take Cover!



A Lesson That Can Save Lives

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Awareness

Follow These Easy Steps for Tornado Safety

Meet with Your Local Emergency Management Coordinator

A school official should work with your Emergency Management Coordinator to establish tornado shelter areas and assist in planning, monitoring and evaluating tornado drills. Local emergency management coordinators are listed on the internet at www.michigan.gov/emd

Have a Plan

Know exactly what to do if the tornado alarm sounds because time counts -- and you may have only seconds. All school personnel should know the established tornado procedures and review them periodically.

Check Tornado Shelter Route Diagrams

Every room and hallway in your school should have a Tornado Shelter Route diagram posted. Schools with basements should use these as shelters. Schools without basements should use interior hallways with load bearing walls on the ground floor, away from exterior walls. Never use gymnasiums, auditoriums or other rooms with wide free-span roofs.

Know The Alarm Sound -

Your school tornado alarm should have a unique sound that students and staff are familiar with. A backup alarm should be available if electrical power fails. When the alarm sounds, stop everything. The teacher should give the students instructions as to how to proceed.

Exit Safely

Students should file out of the classroom in an orderly line. They should walk, not run, to the designated area. Teachers should shut doors after everyone has exited. Do not open windows in the classroom; time is better spent taking shelter. Make sure students with disabilities are given help in getting to the correct area.

Protection Position

When students are assembled in designated tornado shelter areas, they should be instructed to get on their knees, make sure their heads face interior walls, and place their hands over their heads. Illustrations showing the protective position should be posted on bulletin boards.



Outside Areas And Playgrounds

Specific teachers should be assigned to get students from the playground or other outdoor areas during a tornado and direct them to the designated shelter area. Coaches and school athletic directors should have a plan if severe weather occurs during athletic events.

Buses and Dismissal Times

School buses are easily rolled by tornado winds. School buses should not operate while a tornado warning is in effect. If a tornado warning is issued or threatening weather is observed during dismissal times, students should go to the designated tornado shelter area in the school.

Bus drivers should be familiar with the locations of tornado shelters along their routes and be ready to move to the nearest shelter if a warning is issued or threatening weather is sighted. If no shelter is nearby, students should evacuate the bus for a nearby ditch, culvert or ravine. Keeping a safe distance from the bus, students should get into the protective position until the threat of severe weather has passed.