

...Understanding severe weather watches and warnings...

The National Weather Service sees the potential for severe weather...and a stream of weather information flows from our forecast offices to you.

Each National Weather Service forecast office has a web site...a Facebook page...and a Twitter feed where you can find vital information highlighting upcoming weather hazards. The hazardous weather outlook...a text product...highlights weather hazards seven days in advance.

The Storm Prediction Center in Norman Oklahoma also forecasts the chance for severe weather across the country several days in advance. These outlooks will tell you if there is a chance for severe weather...and if you are in a marginal...slight...enhanced slight...moderate...or high risk area for severe weather.

If severe weather becomes likely within six hours...a watch will be issued...alerting you to the increased risk for severe weather. If you are in or close to the watch area...you should plan where to go for shelter if severe weather occurs. If high wind is a threat...tying down or bringing loose objects indoors would be a wise move. If large hail is a threat...protecting your vehicle would be a good idea.

Then...forecasters at the local National Weather Service forecast office will monitor satellite and radar data...and collaborate with severe weather spotters. Forecasters will issue warnings to alert you of the imminent severe weather threat. The warnings are sent out in many different ways in order to reach the most people possible.

A warning is an urgent message telling you that severe weather or flooding is imminent or is occurring. Warnings are usually issued for an area smaller than a county.

A severe thunderstorm warning is issued for wind gusts of 58 mph or higher...or for hail one inch in diameter or larger.

A tornado warning is issued when a tornado is imminent or occurring.

A flash flood warning is issued for rapidly developing life-threatening flooding.

Before and during severe weather...you can receive watches...warnings...and advisories on NOAA All Hazards Weather Radio. Most weather radio receivers have a built in tone alert...which is activated by the National Weather Service when watches and warnings are issued. You will also see warnings on the internet...your mobile device with Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) messages...or hear them on your local radio or television stations.

Do not be caught off guard. Know how to receive watch and warning information...and know what to do when severe weather threatens. Specific safety information will be available each day of this Colorado Severe Weather Preparedness Week.