

THUNDERSTORMS

Thunderstorms are a common occurrence in Alabama, producing damaging winds, heavy rainfall, hail and tornadoes. Severe thunderstorms are more frequent during the active severe weather months of the spring and fall, but can occur anytime of the year, at any time of day. What exactly makes a thunderstorm “severe”? One of several things: a tornado, winds at or above 58 mph, or quarter-size (one inch diameter) hail or larger. Several different types of thunderstorms exist; all are capable of becoming severe.



Single cell thunderstorms usually occur during the summer months when the air is warm, moist, and unstable, and winds are weak. These thunderstorms, also known as pulse or airmass storms, form as individual cells or unorganized clusters of thunderstorms and have little to no movement. They can produce large hail, flash flooding, and microbursts.



Multicell thunderstorms and squall lines are organized complexes of thunderstorms that cover large areas. These storms are more likely to produce severe weather, particularly damaging winds, since they move rapidly across an area. Tornadoes, hail and flash flooding are also possible.



Supercell thunderstorms are the strongest and most dangerous type of thunderstorms. They can produce long-lived tornadoes, winds in excess of 100 mph, and large hail. Fortunately, these storms are not common and usually cover small areas.



Courtesy of Bill Wall
Jefferson County, Mar 15, 2009

The best defense against thunderstorms is to stay inside a substantial building or shelter that will protect you from lightning, wind, hail, tornadoes, and heavy rain. Fortunately, thunderstorms generally pass within an hour. When thunderstorms are expected, stay tuned to your NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards for up to date information. Postpone outdoor activities. Recall your weather safety plan and be ready to take action!



Courtesy of Karen Wingo
Shelby County, Mar 18, 2011