



## Tornado Safety

**Tornado!** The number of tornadoes in Missouri for 2014 was 46, just a bit above the 49 in 2013. That is still well above the average (1950 -2014) of 33 tornadoes. The most active month was June with 12, followed by September with 11. We can't stop tornadoes, but by following Tornado Safety Rules, lives can be saved and injuries prevented.

Warning the public of severe weather is the National Weather Service's (NWS) most important job. To help the public prepare for tornado situations, the NWS has adopted a Watch and Warning program.

**Tornado Watch:** This means that conditions are favorable for severe thunderstorms and possible tornado development. This is the time to prepare. Keep alert by listening to NOAA Weather Radio, or the commercial media for the latest weather information.

**Tornado Warning:** This means a tornado has been sighted or the NWS is seeing signs on radar that indicate a thunderstorm may be capable of producing a tornado at any minute. People in the path of the storm should take immediate life-saving action.

**In Homes and Most Structures:** A basement or other underground location is by far the best shelter from a tornado. If a basement is not available, move to an all interior small room, or other interior location such as a hallway. Stay away from outside walls, doors, and windows. Keep as many walls as you can between you and the wind outside.

In schools, hospitals, factories, shopping centers and other public places, move to designated shelter areas. Interior hallways on the lowest level are best. Stay away from windows and out of auditoriums, gymnasiums, or structures with large free span roofs.

**In Vehicles:** Do not try to outrun a tornado. A tornado does not have to slow down for traffic, stop signs, or curves on the road. ***You must quickly assess your situation!*** If you have a ***clear path***, and you can drive in a direction ***away*** from the tornado, then do so. If necessary, seek shelter in a nearby substantial building. ***As a last resort***, if you have no alternative, abandon your vehicle and hide in a nearby ditch or depression and cover your head. Most deaths occur because of head injuries caused by flying debris.

There have been conflicting opinions concerning highway underpasses and tornadoes. While an underpass can offer protection from rain and hail it may not protect you from a strong tornado. The wind from the tornado will actually accelerate as it blows through the

underpass likely sweeping everything away. There is also the risk of too many people stopping, resulting in the roadway becoming blocked, which can cause more problems. **The best thing to do if severe weather threatens is to not drive. Stay in a safe building until the storms pass.**

**Mobile Homes:** Mobile homes should be abandoned in favor of a more substantial structure if threatened by a tornado. When severe weather is approaching, move to a different location for a couple of hours and wait until the storms have passed. Mobile homes are not built to withstand the strong wind gusts that come from severe thunderstorms or tornadoes.

## **Tornado Myths**

**Myth:** Areas near rivers, lakes, and mountains are safe from tornadoes.

**Fact:** No place is safe from tornadoes. Tornadoes can cross rivers, travel up mountains, and roar through valleys. The terrain changes in Missouri are not believed to be great enough to influence tornado formation or movement.

**Myth:** Low pressure with a tornado causes buildings to "explode" as the tornado passes overhead.

**Fact:** It is the force of the horizontal wind and debris slamming into buildings that causes structural damage during a tornado. It is not the pressure change. The air pressure will drop near a tornado. Many people near a tornado tell of their ears "popping" due to the pressure change.

**Myth:** Windows should be opened before a tornado to equalize pressure and minimize damage.

**Fact:** Opening windows allows damaging winds to enter the structure. Leave the windows alone. It is now believed that a solid structure (no windows or doors open) has a better chance of escaping major damage.

**What if you are out in the open and a tornado approaches?** The best thing to do is to avoid such situations. Try to get to some type of structure for shelter. If nothing is available, as a last resort, go to a low-lying area, such as a ditch, and lie flat. Try to protect your head. Hopefully the flying debris (which is the cause of most deaths and injuries) will fly over you.