

IT'S TORNADO SEASON

BE ON THE ALERT

By

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Tornado season is upon us. Residents are asked to take special care and follow these recommendations:

If you notice threatening weather approaching, check your local radio or television weather reports. Or you may invest in an all band weather radio. While Arlington Heights does have an outdoor warning siren system, do not wait for the siren to seek shelter. Funnel systems can form quickly and may strike before weather sirens can be sounded. Additionally, a microburst can strike without warning since they do not show up on Doppler Radar.

Some residents have questioned why the outdoor warning siren system has not been activated when there has been a "Tornado Warning" issued for Cook County. It must be remembered that Cook County is the largest county in Illinois and the second largest county in the nation. The land area of Cook County, not counting Lake Michigan, is 946 square miles. Arlington Heights, which is located in the extreme northern part of Cook County, is 18 square miles in area. Sounding alerts for sightings, which are many miles away, would prove detrimental to the purpose of the system.

In Arlington Heights the outdoor warning siren system will be activated and an alert will be sounded if a tornado is determined to be in the area. (This will be a distinctive, three to five minute continuous tone). These systems have been designed to warn people who are outdoors or in vehicles to seek shelter. Arlington Heights, as well as many of our neighboring communities, has trained weather spotters who monitor conditions and report to Northwest Central Dispatch. Northwest Central Dispatch additionally monitors broadcasts from the National Weather Service, NOAA and NAWAS.

If you are near your home when the alert sounds, go directly to the basement, an inner hallway, or a bathroom that is free of windows. If you have access to a radio or TV, tune to a news station to determine the progress of the storm and to know when the danger has passed. Arlington Heights does not sound an all-clear signal due to the fact that secondary funnel systems or a microburst may follow turbulent weather.

Per legislation enacted by the 79th General Assembly, all public warning devices in Illinois shall be tested on the first Tuesday of each month uniformly at 10:00 a.m.

Arlington Heights tests our outdoor warning sirens and alert radios systems at this time.

WEATHER FACTS:

There are a variety of severe weather hazards that affect Cook County, Illinois, including: lightning, damaging winds, large hail, flash floods and tornadoes.

Tornadoes pose the greatest severe weather threat to life and property in Cook County. Tornado season in Illinois is from mid-March through June, but tornadoes have occurred in every month of the year. They are most frequently seen from mid-afternoon through the early evening. Most tornadoes move from southwest toward the northeast.

Tornadoes usually move at speeds of 30 to 40 mph, but they can move as fast as 70 mph. Most Cook County tornadoes produce wind gusts of 50 to 120 mph and last only a few minutes. However, there have been tornadoes that were large, violent, wide spread and long lasting with wind gusts of over 300 mph and moving up to 70 mph. Illinois averages 29 tornadoes per year. However, in 1998, 105 tornadoes were reported in Illinois, two short of the record 107 that occurred in 1974.

Not every severe thunderstorm will produce a tornado, but if conditions are right, a tornado can develop in minutes. Tornadoes can take many forms, but are typically funneled shaped with very high wind speeds. The clouds are dark and rotating, winds increase, and large hail is very common. Often debris will be seen flying in a swirling motion in the air. The sound that a tornado produces is unique, and has often been described as sounding like a freight train

Straight-line downburst winds, sometimes called microbursts, from severe thunderstorms often reach speeds of 50 to 80 mph and sometimes exceed 100 mph. Unlike tornadoes a microburst doesn't show up on Doppler Radar and can strike without warning. These downburst winds can down trees and large limbs, power lines and poles and cause severe structural damage to buildings. Significant damage can be seen in lightweight buildings or weaker structures such as mobile homes. Severe thunderstorms usually approach from the southwest or west, but can move from the northwest particularly in mid to late summer. Damaging winds often are preceded by a dark low-hanging row of clouds on the leading edge of an approaching storm, known as a wall cloud.

TORNADO MYTHS:

Myth:

The low pressure with a tornado causes buildings to explode as the tornado passes overhead.

Fact:

Violent winds and debris slamming into buildings, vehicles, and people causes most of the severe damage.

Myth:

Windows should be opened before a tornado approaches to equalize the pressure and minimize damage.

Fact:

Opening windows just allows damaging rain, wind and debris to enter the structure. Leave the windows alone; instead immediately go to a safe place.

WATCHES & WARNINGS:

Severe Thunderstorm Watch:

Conditions are favorable for severe thunderstorms to develop in the area.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning:

Severe thunderstorms are imminent and are occurring in the area.

Tornado Watch:

Tornadoes are possible in your area. Remain alert for approaching storms.

Tornado Warning:

A tornado has been sighted or indicated by Doppler Radar in the area.

Sometimes tornadoes develop in areas in which a severe thunderstorm watch or warning is in effect. Remain alert to signs of approaching storms and quickly changing conditions and seek shelter if threatening conditions exist.

FAMILY DISASTER PLAN:

Follow these basic steps to develop a family disaster plan.

Get informed.

Find out what type of disasters could occur in your community and how you should respond.

Create a plan.

One of the most important steps in preparing for emergencies is to develop a plan. Your family may not be together when a disaster strikes, so plan how you will contact one another. Have two different meeting places, one away from your neighborhood in case you cannot return home, so your family can reunite. Choose an out-of-state friend or family member as your family-check-in-contact for everyone to call or e-mail in case your family gets separated. Make certain that this person is aware of your plan and their involvement. Discuss and practice your plan with all household members.

Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit.

Having essential supplies on hand will make your family more comfortable. Keep in mind that roads and stores may be closed immediately after a disaster. Things you take for granted like gas, electricity, food, and water may be hard to secure during an emergency. Start with a three-day supply of non-perishable food and water. Add a battery-powered flashlight and radio; a first aid kit and required medications for family members with special needs; baby formula, diapers, and pets supplies if required. These are all examples of items that could be included in your family's Disaster Supplies Kit.

If you have any questions or if we can be of any help, please contact the Arlington Heights Emergency Management Agency at 847-368-5459.

Don't Be Afraid, Be Ready. Get Informed, Create a Plan, Make a Kit.