

Severe Weather Season is here! Severe weather season can bring frightening storms, incredible damage and change lives in the blink of an eye. The best way to meet violent Texas weather is to be prepared in every way possible. Those who have experienced a tornado or a flash flood first-hand will tell you just how serious and devastating severe weather in Texas can be. The good news is that most weather can be predicted. The bad news is that many weather-related deaths still occur each year in Texas despite advance warning. The first step to being prepared is realizing that severe weather can happen at any time—and it can happen to you.

Each year, Americans cope with an average of:

- 10,000 thunderstorms
- 1,500 floods
- 1,000 tornadoes
- 6 deadly hurricanes

Severe Thunderstorm and Lightning

Thunderstorms can be exciting to watch, especially from the safety of your warm, comfy couch. Besides staying dry, here's another good reason to stay inside (and stay off the telephone during severe weather)—lightning kills more people each year than tornadoes. Since every thunderstorm produces lightning, you need to be prepared! Flash floods and hail are also dangers associated with thunderstorms. We'll help you prepare for them too, later on in this section.

ONE ONE-THOUSAND, TWO ONE-THOUSAND, KABOOM! By counting the seconds between the flash and the thunder and dividing by five, you can estimate your distance from the strike (in miles).

THUNDERSTORM FACTS

- In Texas, most thunderstorms happen in the afternoon.

- Thunder and lightning can sometimes even come with a snowstorm!
- At any moment in time, over 1,800 thunderstorms are occurring around the world-that's 16 million a year!
- The typical thunderstorm is 15 miles in diameter and lasts an average of 30 minutes.

Severe Thunderstorm and Lightning Safety Tips:

- If you can hear thunder, you're close enough to be struck by lightning—find safe shelter immediately.
- Move to a sturdy building and stay away from the windows (don't take shelter in a shed, under isolated trees or in a convertible vehicle).
- If a sturdy shelter is not available, get inside a hardtop vehicle, keep the windows up, and do not touch metal.
- Get out of boats and away from water.
- Unplug appliances and avoid using the telephone except in an emergency.

If Someone Is Hit by Lightning:

- You may touch them—they don't carry an electrical charge.
- Call for help immediately. Being struck by lightning can cause burns or nervous system damage, broken bones and loss of hearing and eyesight.
- Give first aid or CPR if necessary.

Lightning Fact vs. Fiction

Fiction: Lightning never strikes the same place twice.

Fact: Lightning has “favorite” sites that it may hit many times during one storm.

Fiction: If it's not raining, then there's no danger from lightning.

Fact: Lightning often strikes outside of heavy rain and may occur as far as 10 miles away from any rainfall.

Fiction: The rubber soles of shoes or rubber tires on a car will protect you from being struck by lightning.

Fact: Rubber-soled shoes and rubber tires provide NO protection from lightning. However, the steel frame of a hard-topped vehicle provides increased protection if you are not touching metal. Although you may be injured if lightning strikes your car, you are much safer inside a vehicle than outside.

Fiction: People struck by lightning carry an electrical charge and should not be touched.

Fact: Lightning-strike victims carry no electrical charge and should be attended to immediately.

Fiction: "Heat lightning" occurs after very hot summer days and poses no threat.

Fact: What is referred to, as "heat lightning" is actually lightning from a thunderstorm too far away for thunder to be heard. However, the storm may be moving in your direction, so be prepared!

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Tornados



Texas averages 125 tornadoes every year- more than any other state. Oklahoma comes in second with an average of 57 per year.

Twisters can occur at any time of year but spring and summer are considered tornado season around here. And while tornadoes can happen at any time of day, they're most likely to occur between 3 and 9 p.m. So when your afternoon talk show or evening sitcom is interrupted for a tornado watch or warning—pay attention and don't go outside!

When a Tornado Watch or Warning Has Been Issued, Look out for:

- Dark, often greenish sky
- Wall cloud/Supercell (a heavy, lowering cloud that is rain-free and may begin to rotate)
- Large hail
- Loud roar; similar to a freight train

Caution: Some tornadoes appear as a visible funnel extending only partially to the ground. Look for signs of debris below the visible funnel. Tornadoes can be obscured by rain or nearby low-hanging clouds.

SOURCE: Nature's Most Violent Storms, A Preparedness Guide, USDC, NOAA, NWS

Tornado Safety Tips:

- Designate a shelter area in your home or place of business, such as a basement, and go there during severe weather.
- If an underground shelter is not available, move to an interior room or hallway on the lowest floor and get under a sturdy piece of furniture. Note: Lower-level interior bathrooms provide the best protection if no basement is available. The plumbing provides additional sturdiness to the walls.
- Stay away from windows.
- Don't try to outrun a tornado in your car—leave it immediately and seek shelter in a sturdy building.
- Mobile homes should always be abandoned during severe weather. If no shelter is available, get out of vehicles and find the most low-lying area (ditch, ravine, etc.) lay flat on your stomach and cover your head with your hands.
- Occasionally, tornadoes develop so rapidly that advance warning is not possible. Remain alert for signs of an approaching tornado and watch for flying debris.