



READINESS RULES

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Office of Security & Emergency Preparedness Bulletin

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Featured Article

Tornado Safety

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It was 4:17 a.m. on Saturday, April 8, 2006 in Marietta, Georgia. I awoke to some horrendous winds that literally shook the house. Tornado sirens were barely audible, masked by the wind and the rustling of shaking trees.

As a Meteorologist, I knew the day prior that the National Storm Prediction Center had issued a Moderate Risk for severe weather (a substantial risk) for Northern Georgia. I knew the wind that I was witnessing could only be associated with a severe thunderstorm.

As I gazed out of my upstairs window at the storm, I could see occasional green flashes of light in the distance that were ground based - the distinctive signal of power transformers blowing up, a sign that this severe thunderstorm was producing a tornado. As the power flickered around the neighborhood, I could only imagine the damage being inflicted nearby.

As I rushed to the basement to take shelter, I could only wonder why my NOAA weather radio did not alert me to the Tornado Warning that the National Weather Service had issued. Once the storm had passed, I made my way to the weather radio to determine why I was not warned. It had been inadvertently unplugged and I had not installed backup batteries. I was lucky that night.

This actual account of severe weather that I was affected by illustrates one of the most important components of a disaster preparedness plan: having a NOAA weather radio and checking periodically to ensure proper operation.

NOAA weather radios are equipped with Specific Area Message Encoding (SAME) technology that ensures that you only receive information about hazards in your area. NOAA weather radios receive broadcasts for all hazards, not just weather related hazards. In my opinion, NOAA weather radios are the best source for hazard related information in your residence.

When the threat of a severe thunderstorm or tornado occurs in your area, you should seek shelter in a safe place immediately. In your residence, move to the lowest level and put as many walls between you and the outside as possible. Do not place yourself in proximity to windows as a breach would cause flying glass. Often times, the bathroom is a good choice for shelter. A basement is the best choice for shelter if available.

DO NOT attempt to leave your residence to get away from the storm. Tornadoes can move upwards of 50 mph. Lightning, strong straight line winds (non tornado related winds can exceed 100 mph) and hail also pose a risk to safety. Stay in your residence.

If you are not inside a sturdy residence and are outdoors when a tornado threatens, seek shelter in a ditch or low lying area. Lie flat on the ground and attempt to minimize exposure to winds as flying debris is the primary reason for injuries that occur outdoors. Do not seek shelter near a tree or any standing structure as this increases your risk to lightning. DO NOT seek shelter under a freeway overpass. As winds move up the cement embankment, they are accelerated. This increases your exposure to airborne debris. Freeway overpasses are the worst places to seek shelter outdoors.

Remember, have a NOAA weather radio so you are able to be alerted to hazards that may affect you in your area. When a tornado threatens, stay in your residence and seek shelter on the lowest level and the most interior room. Outdoors, seek a low lying area and stay away from trees and standing structures.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF NOAA

UGA Severe Weather Preparedness

Georgia is vulnerable to a range of severe and potentially life-threatening weather, including tornadoes. Over the past 50 years, a total of 1,220 tornadoes were reported in Georgia, including 33 in the year 2000. While tornadoes have occurred in every month of the year in Georgia, the months of March through May are the most active period of tornadic activity in the state.

The University of Georgia campus recently participated in the 2006 State of Georgia Severe Weather Drill which occurred on February 22, 2006. The drill is conducted on an annual basis statewide by the National Weather Service and the Office of Homeland Security-GEMA. Generally, participation in the drill is encouraged by the Governor and other emergency management officials but is conducted on a voluntary basis.

The UGA community was encouraged to either physically shelter in their pre-designated sheltering areas or to reflect upon what actions they would take should a real severe weather event occur on campus. UGA's Office of Security & Emergency Preparedness made pre drill notifications, posted tornado safety suggestions on the departmental website, initiated a post drill assessment, and summarized the results of the assessment for an executive briefing as a part of the University's participation in the drill.

Almost 800 UGA students, faculty, staff, and administrators responded to the post drill survey. From this helpful feedback, the Office of Security & Emergency Preparedness was able to make modifications and plans to better respond to future drills and real weather events. Specifically, one faulty siren

was repaired, the campus emergency notification system antennae was replaced, and additional planning has commenced regarding effective emergency notification and sheltering practices across campus.

Did You Know?

In March and May of 1973, two separate tornadoes struck in Clarke County and the surrounding counties causing an estimated 40 million dollars worth of damage. In addition, two deaths and hundreds of injuries were associated with these two devastating spring storms.

We also learned that many individuals on campus rely too heavily on the outdoor emergency sirens. These sirens are designed to warn people who are outdoors to seek shelter inside. Most are not easily audible indoors. Instead, you should rely on building paging systems or "telephone trees;" NOAA weather radios; and email alerts, you can easily subscribe to online, to warn you of severe weather when you are indoors. Always seek shelter in the lowest level of a building away from exterior doors and windows whenever possible.

We sincerely appreciate the students, faculty, staff, and administrators who participated in the drill and responded to our post drill survey. With everyone's help, we will all be better prepared for severe weather emergencies like the tornado that struck the University of Kansas this spring, destroying more than 60% of the campus buildings.

For more information on tornado safety, please see the "tornado safety tips" on our website at www.uosp.uga.edu. Remember, *Readiness Saves Lives!*



Upcoming Issue: Personal Planning for Pandemic Flu

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