

Safety during a tornado

If a tornado is imminent, immediate shelter should be sought. Attempting to rescue or evacuate animals could endanger human lives, but pets should be evacuated from a mobile home if possible to do so immediately. If a tornado watch is issued and the barns housing horses and livestock are not tornado proof, turning horses and other livestock out to an open pasture should be considered, but only if there is no danger to animals from flying debris. As a last resort, animals should be turned out into a treeless pasture as far as possible from any buildings (especially buildings with metal roofs) and away from utility poles and unsecured construction materials. Ideally this area will have a low-lying area where the animals will choose to lie down and protect themselves.

Families and pets should immediately go to a storm cellar or shelter or, if no shelter is available, to a basement. Staying under a heavy workbench or stairs in the basement can provide additional protection, and areas directly underneath heavy appliances on the floor above should be avoided. In homes with no basement, the safest area is in the center of the house away from the windows or in a small room on the ground floor that is away from outside walls. Taking cover under solid furniture or mattresses is an additional safety measure. It is important to protect the head.

After a tornado, fire hazards such as broken electrical wires or damaged electrical equipment, gas or oil leaks, other hazardous materials, or smoldering piles of wet hay or feed are possible dangers. Downed utility lines or other hazards should be reported immediately to the appropriate authorities.

If a roof sustains storm damage, it is advisable not to walk on it for safety reasons and because any additional load may make the damage worse. If many buildings in the community have extensive damage, a number of contractors are likely to offer low-cost repairs. These contractors should be avoided, especially if they are not established in the community. In the past there have been problems with this type of “fly by night” contractor leaving town before paying for supplies. This cost may fall on the owner. Sometimes it is better to wait to start repairs for several months because costs are often lower than immediately after the storm.