



City of Fairfax Prepared

Thunderstorms

A thunderstorm affects a relatively small area when compared to a hurricane or a winter storm. The typical thunderstorm is 15 miles in diameter and lasts an average of 30 minutes. Despite their small size, ALL thunderstorms are dangerous! Of the estimated 100,000 thunderstorms that occur each year in the United States, about 10 percent are classified as severe.

Understanding Watches and Warnings

- **Severe Thunderstorm Watch** - Severe thunderstorms are possible in and near the watch area. Stay informed and be ready to act if a severe thunderstorm warning is issued.
- **Severe Thunderstorm Warning** - Severe weather has been reported by spotters or indicated by radar. Warnings indicate imminent danger to life and property.

Every year people are killed or seriously injured by severe thunderstorms despite advance warning. While some did not hear the warning, others heard the warning and did not pay attention to it. The information in this section, combined with timely watches and warnings about severe weather, may help save lives.



30/30 Rule

- Go inside if you hear thunder within 30 seconds of a lightning flash.
- Wait at least 30 minutes after you hear thunder before going back outside.

Tornados

Although tornadoes occur in many parts of the world, they are found most frequently in the United States. In an average year, 1,200 tornadoes cause 60-65 fatalities and 1,500 injuries nationwide. You can find more information on tornadoes at www.spc.noaa.gov

- Tornadoes can occur at any time of day, any day of the year.
- Have a plan of action before severe weather threatens. You need to respond quickly when a warning is issued or a tornado is spotted.
- When a tornado warning is issued, get to a safe place. If in a home or building it's the **lowest level, most interior room**. If on the road, get to a safe place.
- When conditions are warm, humid, and windy, or skies are threatening, monitor for severe weather watches and warnings by listening to NOAA Weather Radio, logging onto weather.gov or tuning into your favorite television or radio weather information source.

Understand Tornado Watches and Warnings

- **Tornado Watch** - defines a cluster of counties where tornadoes and other kinds of severe weather are possible in the next several hours. It does not mean tornadoes are imminent, just that you need to be alert, and to be prepared to go to safe shelter if tornadoes do happen or a warning is issued. This is the time to turn on local TV or radio, turn on and set the alarm switch on your weather radio, make sure you have ready access to safe shelter, and make your friends and family aware of the potential for tornadoes in the area.
- **Tornado Warning** - A tornado has been spotted, or that Doppler radar indicates a thunderstorm circulation which can spawn a tornado. When a tornado warning is issued for your town or county, take immediate safety precautions. Local NWS offices issue tornado warnings.





Before a Storm

- Check the weather forecast before leaving for extended periods outdoors.
- If a storm is approaching, keep a NOAA Weather Radio or AM/FM radio with you.
- Watch for signs of approaching storms.
- Postpone outdoor activities if storms are imminent.
- Check on neighbors who require special assistance: infants, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

During a Storm

- Move to a sturdy building or car. **DO NOT** take shelter in small sheds, under isolated trees, or in convertible automobiles.
- If lightning occurs and sturdy shelter is not available, get inside a hard top automobile and keep the windows up.
- Get out of boats and away from water.
- Telephone lines and metal pipes can conduct electricity. Unplug appliances not necessary for obtaining weather information. Avoid using the telephone or any electrical appliances. Use phones only in an emergency.
- Do not take a bath or shower
- Turn off air conditioners. Power surges from lightning can overload the compressors.
- Get to higher ground if flash flooding or flooding is possible. **DO NOT** attempt to drive to safety. Most flash flooding deaths occur in automobiles.

If Caught Outdoors Without Shelter

- Find a low spot away from trees, fences, and poles.
- If you are in the woods, take shelter under the shorter trees.
- If you feel your skin tingle or your hair stand on end, squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands on your knees with your head between them. Make yourself the smallest target possible; minimize your contact with the ground.

After the Storm

- Be alert for flooding. If waters are rising quickly or local authorities issue a **flood or flash flood warning**, seek higher ground.
- Stay away from downed power lines to avoid the risk of electric shock or electrocution.

Know how to stay informed.

Receiving timely information about weather conditions or other emergency events can make all the difference in knowing when to take action to be safe.

- Monitor weather reports provided by your local media
- City of Fairfax has several resources to keep you informed:
 - [Clityscreen Channel 12](#) (Cox Channel 12)
 - [City of Fairfax Alert System](#)
- Consider buying a NOAA Weather Radio (NWR)
- Think about how to stay informed if there is a power outage.
 - Keep extra batteries for a battery operated radio and your cellphone

Additional Resources

- [City of Fairfax OEM](#)
- [City of Fairfax Disaster Information](#)
- [Regional, State and Federal Resources](#)

For more information about how you can be prepared, please contact City of Fairfax Office of Emergency Management at 703-385-4856 or OEM@fairfaxva.gov