

Severe Weather Shelters

When tornadoes and other severe weather affect your area, it is incredibly important that you know where a good shelter is. In general these are some characteristics of a GOOD tornado/severe weather shelter.

- Located on the lowest floor of the building
- Located in the interior portion of the building
- No exterior doors
- No windows
- No heavy appliances directly you above you
- Below ground (if possible)



As implied by this list above, the best places to seek shelter are basements, interior closets and bathrooms on the first floor, or interior hallways that do not open directly outside. Your home shelter should also be within reach of your disaster/storm safety kit.

These places are always the best places to take shelter. However, if you are not home or at school, any enclosed building is a better shelter than staying outside or in a vehicle during a tornado. If you must stay in your vehicle, be sure the vehicle is parked outside of driving lanes and that you are not parked under an overpass. An overpass is NEVER the best place to take shelter. Most importantly, NEVER TRY TO OUTFRAN A TORNADO.

When going to shelter, move quickly and do not worry about taking anything besides yourself, other family members, and pets. Remember, a toy, television, or video game console can be replaced, you cannot! Once you are in shelter, do not emerge until you are 100% sure that the weather has passed. Utilize NOAA weather radios and other methods to ensure you are safe to emerge.

At school, going to shelter is obviously a much more complex situation. At home, you may need shelter for no more than six to ten people, but at school, the shelter needs to be large enough to accommodate every student, staff member, and guest in the building. Plus, considerations need to be made in order to have enough space for students and guests who may have special needs.

Some locations in your school that are BAD shelters include:

- Gymnasium
- Auditorium
- Cafeteria
- Classrooms with Exterior Windows

These locations are bad for multiple reasons. The first three rooms typically have very high ceilings and may have very large equipment in or on top of them. High ceilings can be affected by strong tornadic winds and heavy equipment increases the injury risk for those that might be sheltered with it. Therefore, even though you can shelter a large number of people in them, they are not good places to shelter people during a severe weather or tornado threat (Side Note: Sometimes, these are good shelters during winter weather threats, because the need to be underground is significantly minimized). Classrooms with exterior windows are bad shelter locations for the reasons outlined above; there are not many walls between you and the outside and the windows may break, sending shards of glass into those attempting to seek shelter.

Like in homes and other buildings, the best shelter is a basement. However, not all schools have a basement, or the basements are not often very large. While some people can shelter in small basements, there needs to be other locations available for students, staff, and guests to be able to stay safe.

The next best options include interior bathrooms on the first floor of the building, interior hallways or interior classrooms on the lowest floor of the building. The best shelters put the most number of walls between the ones being sheltered and the outside.

Again, it should be reminded that being in any permanent structure is better than being outside or in a vehicle in a tornado sheltering situation. Therefore, if your school has external classrooms, it is critical that students and staff in those classrooms are able to take shelter within the main school building quickly and safely, if severe weather strikes.



5. Imagine you are at the park. You hear a tone come from your smartphone and notice an alert saying you are under a Severe Thunderstorm Warning. It's cloudy, but you don't hear any thunder, see lightning, nor is it raining. You go back to where your bike is and, seemingly out of nowhere, it begins to rain. You hear a rumble of thunder and feel a strong gust of wind. You see a lightning strike off in the distance. You decide to leave your bike for now and go find somewhere safe to wait out the storm. The following options are available to you, as the rain picks up in intensity, you see more flashes of lightning, and another gust nearly knocks you down. Of these options, which one should you go to? Explain your answer below.
- The gazebo next to the bike rack
 - Underneath a playscape in an open area
 - A bathroom thirty feet away
 - The coffee shop a half mile down the road
 - Under a tree behind you
6. True or False? A good shelter during a Tornado Warning is your school's gymnasium.
7. Imagine you are babysitting your neighbor's four year old son on a Sunday afternoon. You are watching a basketball game on TV while he is playing with some action figures. Your game is interrupted to let you know that your area is under a Tornado Warning. The meteorologist on TV says you need to get into shelter immediately. The radar image he displays has a large storm cell coming directly toward your town. You look outside and it is very dark and you can't see much of anything. You are unsure of where to go, because your neighbor's house does not have a basement. Which of the following locations should you and your neighbor's son go to take shelter? Explain your answer below.
- Your house's basement
 - A first floor bedroom closet in the neighbor's house
 - A bathroom with a window
 - The living room



8. Imagine you are a teacher. There is a chance of severe weather on the night you are hosting a few parent-teacher conferences. Your classroom is on the first floor of the building. During your last conference, around 7:30pm, the parents' and your cell phones all go off with a Tornado Warning. You are unsure of how close the storm system is to your location, so you call the main office, where no one answers. One of the parents looks at radar on this phone, and sees a strong storm cell moving toward the area. What do you do? Explain your answer below.
- Continue the conference, because your classroom is on the first floor.
 - Continue to call the main office, because there is supposed to be someone there.
 - Move to the interior bathroom across the hall, because you want to stay safe.
 - Call your local Emergency Management Agency, because you want to know what everyone else is doing.
9. You are debating storm safety with your older sister. She doesn't believe in taking shelter during storms because "none have ever hit the neighborhood before". She lives in a first floor apartment about a mile from your house. You are annoyed by what she is saying, and are about to leave as a thunderstorm begins. You then decide to wait out the rain because you don't want to walk in the rain. You have just sat back down on the couch when your phone goes off indicating a Tornado Warning in the area. She chuckles seeing you read the alert and goes into the kitchen. You want to take shelter and keep your sister safe. What do you do? Explain your answer below.
- The kitchen is an interior room. You join her and keep her occupied in the kitchen as the storm passes.
 - Run to the bathroom, even though it has a window, and save yourself.
 - You go home and will call her after the storm passes.
 - You just sit on the couch and hope for the best.



10. You are in the car with your older brother. While he is driving home, you notice a funnel cloud form in the distance. Within a minute, both your phones sound an alarm that a tornado warning has been issued for your area and that the funnel cloud seems to have touched down. You are about a fifteen minute drive from home. The funnel cloud is moving toward the direction of your house. What should you and your brother do?

Explain your answer below.

- a. Continue driving home. The tornado is unlikely be in the way.
- b. Pull the vehicle over and wait for the tornado warning to end.
- c. Drive at the tornado and attempt to outrun it.
- d. Get out of the vehicle and hide under a nearby overpass.

11. Using your knowledge of storm shelters, which of these rooms/buildings would be the safest during a tornado warning? Explain your answer below.

- a. A Greenhouse
- b. A Shed
- c. A Fast Food Restaurant's Kitchen
- d. A Bank's Vault

12. True or False. In general, a central room on the first floor of a building is a safer than a room closer to the outside.

