

## **Tornado Watches and Warnings** **By Director Ray McCoy**

In Minnesota tornadoes occur mainly in April, May and June. Director Ray McCoy stated, "Tornadoes are nature's most violent storms and can leave an area devastated in seconds." When a tornado is coming, you have only a short amount of time to make life-or-death decisions. Advance planning and quick response are the keys to surviving a tornado. A tornado appears as a rotating, funnel-shaped cloud, striking the ground with whirling winds of up to 200 miles per hour or more.

The National Weather Service issues a tornado watch when tornadoes are possible in your area. Remain alert for approaching storms. This is the time to remind family members where the safest places within your home are located, and listen to the radio or television for further developments.

**Watches** are issued when conditions are favorable for tornadoes, flash floods or severe thunderstorms.

The National Weather Service considers a thunderstorm to be severe if it is associated with wind speeds of 58 miles per hour or more, hail 3/4-inch in diameter or larger and heavy rain.

If you are in a watch area, make plans to seek shelter if necessary.

**Warnings** are issued when severe weather has been reported or is imminent. Seek shelter immediately if you are in or near the path of the storm.

A tornado warning is issued when a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. If a tornado warning is issued for your area and the sky becomes threatening, move to your pre-designated place of safety. Turn on a battery-operated radio and wait for further instructions.

When the sirens sound to notify you of bad weather conditions please tune into a local broadcast channel.

PLEASE DO NOT CALL 911.

Warnings are issued by county names. Know the name of the county you live in and the counties that surround you.

### **Preparation:**

Have the following disaster supplies on hand:

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water
- Non-electric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards

Designate an area in the home as a shelter, and practice having everyone in the family go there in response to a tornado threat. The best protection during a tornado is an interior room on the lowest levels of a building, preferably a basement or storm cellar.

In case family members are separated from one another during a tornado (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school or at home), have a plan for getting together.

If you are in the affected area, take shelter immediately. If you are outside and not being immediately threatened by the severe weather, move indoors quickly. If you are immediately threatened, take cover by lying on the ground, preferably in a low area, safe from flying objects and flooding. Do not drive in the area of a tornado or severe straight-line winds. Under most circumstances, inside a vehicle is one of the most dangerous places to be during a tornado or severe thunderstorm. Winds in some storms can pick up a car and toss it great distances.

Extra precautions are needed in schools, hospitals, nursing homes and office buildings. There is a large concentration of people in a small area, but these buildings usually have a large amount of glass on outside walls. Get into the innermost portions of the lowest floor possible. Avoid windows, glass doorways, auditoriums and cafeterias that are not protected by overhead floors and rooms. Restrooms are excellent storm shelters. Do not use elevators, the power could go off and you could be trapped. Protect your head and make yourself as small a target as possible by crouching down.

A reminder from Director McCoy, "The weather warnings are broadcast before the storms arrive. It begins when the weather indicates the possibility of severe weather. You are responsible for preparing and protecting yourself and your family." West Hennepin Public Safety wants the citizens to be prepared and protected.