

Tornado Preparedness

Tornado Procedures

The Twin Cities, County, and the University of Illinois are prepared to keep a watchful eye on weather conditions and to warn the populace of impending tornadoes. This will be done by sounding the civil defense sirens, located in strategic positions throughout the campus, for a continuous three minute unwavering blast. The sirens will be sounded only if a tornado is actually sighted or if the University is mentioned as being in the path of an approaching tornado (tornado warning sirens are tested on the first Tuesday of the month at 10:00 a.m.). The Public Safety Division, consisting of both the Police and Fire Departments, will also receive the warning.

If you are **outside** when you hear the warning siren, seek inside shelter, preferable in a steel framed or concrete building or in a building that is marked with tornado shelter placards. Stay away from all windows.

If you are **inside** a building, go to the interior hallway or other enclosed area that is away from windows and on a lower floor of the building. Avoid going into auditoriums, gymnasiums, or other such large rooms where roof collapse may be likely. In wooden buildings, such as houses, the least hazardous place is in the basement or under heavy furniture in the center of the building and away from all windows.

In the event of casualties, give first aid to the best of your ability and notify the Fire Department as soon as possible at 911.

Tornado Warning Guidelines

All staff and students should read these tornado guidelines. A tornado warning alert is provided by sirens located throughout the campus. A continual siren at any time, except for the emergency test conducted the first Tuesday of each month at 10:00 a.m., indicates an emergency condition. It is presumed to be a tornado warning unless informed by officials to the contrary.

Tornadoes are unpredictable, therefore you should avoid exterior windows, walls, and ceiling whenever possible. Statistics state that the northeast corner of the building is the safest. Caution and common sense by each individual is of utmost importance, and, in particular, actions that may cause panic should be avoided.

General Guidelines:

- Staff and students will be advised when a tornado warning is in effect and are encouraged to comply with these guidelines.
- All persons should be encouraged to remain inside a safe area until the warning is canceled.
- Stay away from all glass windows and exterior doors at all times.
- Any evacuation should be done in an orderly fashion and insofar as possible along the north side of the building to a safety area.

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- Northeast stairwells should be used, if available, since tornadoes generally follow a southwest to northwest path.
- DO NOT USE THE ELEVATORS.
- Doors to all rooms should be kept closed.

For All Buildings:

- Evacuate any rooms that are on the top floor or that have an exterior wall at ground level or above.
- Floors below ground level, hallways, and rooms in the center of a building that are not on the top floor may be used as shelters.

Tornado Warning Siren Procedures

The decision to activate the sirens will be based upon the following situations:

- A funnel cloud or tornado has been sighted by or has been confirmed by law enforcement or Fire Department personnel which is threatening the University complex.
- A tornado has touched down within any of the three jurisdictions.
- A report of a tornado radar echo threatening the University complex has been received from the U. S. Weather Service.
- The report of a tornado of funnel cloud threatening the University complex has been received from the Champaign County ESDA emergency operations center.

The siren warning signal is intended to advise all who hear it to take cover for a period of 30 minutes. Should the dangers outlined in the above continue to be in existence, the warning signal will be repeated every 30 minutes for as long as those conditions continue to exist or if new similar situations develop.

Tornado Questions and Answers

March through October is "tornado season" in Central Illinois, but a tornado can occur at any time of the year, day or night. Two of the most asked questions about tornadoes are:

Q. What is the difference between a funnel cloud and a tornado?

A. A funnel cloud is just what its name implies. It is a funnel-shaped cloud that does not touch the ground. When it touches the ground then it is referred to as a tornado.

Q. Where does Illinois rank in tornado frequency?

A. The Central United States is the area of maximum tornado frequency. Of the central states, Illinois ranks eighth in frequency. Although Illinois has a high rate, the probability of a tornado striking twice in exactly the same place is once in 500 years.

The following terms are used by the media and emergency agencies when referring to a tornado:

- **Tornado Watch:** Weather conditions are ripe to produce these storms. You should be alert to changing weather conditions and a "tornado warning" being announced.
- **Tornado Warning:** A tornado has been sighted in the area.

The "tornado warning" signal is a long blast from the emergency siren which is repeated every 30 minutes while the warning is in effect.

- If you are in a University building, there are signs showing where safe areas in the building are located. Make sure you are familiar with these areas.
- If you are at home, take shelter in the basement, crawl space, or the smallest room in the center of your house.
- If you are in a car or open area, take shelter in a ditch, ravine, or ground depression.

For Tornado Preparedness Plans for the Urbana-Champaign campus, see [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Tornado Preparedness Plan](#).

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