

Severe Weather Awareness

Tips and Guidelines

Tornados

South Carolina has averaged 11 tornadoes each year since 1950, resulting in 47 fatalities and 1,057 injuries. South Carolina ranks twenty-sixth in the United States in the number of tornado strikes, and eighteenth in the number of tornadoes per square mile. The most common type of tornado, the relatively weak and short-lived type, occurs between March and May. However, tornadoes can occur almost anywhere at anytime.

Before a Tornado

Be alert to changing weather conditions.

- Listen to NOAA Weather Radio or to commercial radio or television newscasts for the latest information.
- Look for approaching storms.
- Look for the following danger signs:
 - Dark, often greenish sky
 - Large hail
 - A large, dark, low-lying cloud (particularly if rotating)
 - Loud roar, similar to a freight train

If you see approaching storms or any of the danger signs, be prepared to take shelter immediately.

During a Tornado

If you are under a tornado warning, seek shelter immediately.

- Get indoors to a pre-designated shelter area such as a basement, storm cellar or the lowest building level. If there is no basement, go to the center of an interior room on the lowest level (closet, interior hallway) away from corners, windows, doors and outside walls.
- Shutter windows and outside doors.
- If in a vehicle, trailer or mobile home, get out immediately and go to the lowest floor of a sturdy, nearby building or storm shelter.
- If unable to get indoors, lie flat in a nearby ditch or depression and cover your head with your hands. Be aware of potential flooding and flying debris.
- Never try to outrun a tornado in your vehicle. Instead, leave the vehicle immediately for safe shelter.

After a Tornado

- Use the telephone only for emergency calls.
- Avoid downed power lines and report them to your utility company.
- Stay out of damaged buildings.



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Thunderstorms

All thunderstorms are dangerous. Every thunderstorm produces lightning. In the United States, an average of 300 people are injured and 80 people are killed each year by lightning. Although most lightning victims survive, people struck by lightning often report a variety of long-term, debilitating symptoms. Other associated dangers of thunderstorms include tornadoes, strong winds, hail and flash flooding. Flash flooding is responsible for more fatalities—more than 140 annually—than any other thunderstorm-associated hazard.

Before a Thunderstorm

- Listen to NOAA Weather Radio or to commercial radio or television newscasts for the latest information.
- Remove dead or rotting trees and branches that could fall and cause injury or damage. Secure outdoor objects that could blow away or cause damage.
- “If thunder roars, go indoors.” No place outside is safe when lightning is in the area.

During a Thunderstorm

- Shutter windows and secure outside doors. If shutters are not available, close window blinds, shades or curtains.
- If unable to get indoors, seek shelter in a low area and be alert for flash flooding and flying debris.
- Avoid isolated sheds or other small structures in open areas. Avoid anything metal: tractors, farm equipment, motorcycles and golf carts.
- If on open water, get to land and find shelter immediately.
- Your hair standing on end is an indication that lightning is about to strike. If this happens, squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands over your ears and your head between your knees. Make yourself the smallest target possible and minimize your contact with the ground. Do not lie flat on the ground.

After a Thunderstorm

The following are things you should check when you attempt to give aid to a victim of lightning:

- **Immediately call 911.**
- **Breathing** - if breathing has stopped, begin mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
- **Heartbeat** - if the heart has stopped, administer CPR only if you are properly trained to do so.
- **Pulse** - if the victim has a pulse and is breathing, look for other possible injuries. Check for burns where the lightning entered and left the body. Also, be alert for nervous system damage, broken bones and loss of hearing and eyesight.



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Flooding

In South Carolina, several variations of flood hazards occur due to the different effects of severe thunderstorms, hurricanes, seasonal rains and other weather-related conditions. The State's low-lying topography, combined with its humid subtropical climate, makes it highly vulnerable to inland or riverine flooding. Riverine flooding occurs when the flow of rainwater runoff is greater than the carrying capacities of the natural drainage systems.

In comparison to riverine flooding, coastal flooding is usually the result of a severe weather system such as a tropical storm or hurricane, which contains an element of high winds. The damaging effects of coastal floods are caused by a combination of storm surge, wind, rain, erosion and battering by debris.

Before a Flood

- Avoid building in a flood prone area unless you elevate and reinforce your home.
- Elevate the furnace, water heater and electric panel if susceptible to flooding.
- Install check valves in sewer traps to prevent floodwater from backing up into the drains of your home.
- Contact community officials to find out if they are planning to construct barriers (levees, berms or floodwalls) to stop floodwater from entering the homes in your area.
- Seal the walls in your basement with waterproofing compounds to avoid seepage.
- Review your insurance policy. Flood coverage is not part of most homeowner, mobile home or renter's insurance policies. There is a 30-day waiting period for coverage to take effect.

During a Flood

- Be aware of potential flash flooding. If there is any possibility of a flash flood, move to higher ground. Do not wait to be told to move.
- If time allows, prepare your home for a flood by moving essential items to an upper floor, bring in outdoor furniture, disconnect electrical appliances and be prepared to turn off the gas, electricity and water.
- Do not walk through moving water. Six inches of moving water can make you fall. If you have to walk in water, walk where the water is not moving. Use a stick to check the firmness of the ground in front of you.
- Do not drive into flooded areas. If floodwaters rise around your car, abandon the car and move to higher ground if you can do so safely. You and the vehicle could be quickly swept away.

After a Flood

- After a flood, listen for news reports to learn whether the community's water supply is safe to drink.
- Avoid floodwaters; water may be contaminated by oil, gasoline or raw sewage. Water may also be electrically charged from underground or downed power lines.
- Be aware of areas where floodwaters have receded. Even if the roadway of a bridge or elevated highway looks normal, the support structures below may be damaged.
- Stay clear of downed power lines and report them to your power company.
- Use extreme caution when entering buildings; there may be hidden damage, particularly to foundations. Stay out of any building that is surrounded by floodwaters.
- Clean and disinfect everything that got wet. Mud left from floodwater can contain sewage and other harmful chemicals.

