



THE ATMOSPHERIC RESERVOIR

Examining the Atmosphere and Atmospheric Resource Management

SUMMER WEATHER PREPAREDNESS



By Mark D. Schneider

As the spring season transitions into summer, the likelihood of hearing the familiar rumble of thunder rises along with the temperature. Summer's longer and warmer days help provide the energy the atmosphere needs to produce some of Mother Nature's most impressive displays. While thunderstorms are awesome to watch, they are a double-edged sword, producing the majority of growing season precipitation in North Dakota, but also bringing severe weather which may include lightning, hail, floods, high winds, or even tornadoes. There are a number of things you can do to protect yourself and your property from severe summer weather. The first, and probably most important, boils down to one thing: awareness.

Be aware of watches and warnings issued this summer around the state. A *Watch* means conditions are favorable for the development of severe weather in the affected area. The Storm Prediction Center (<http://www.spc.noaa.gov>), located in Norman, Oklahoma, is responsible for forecasting severe weather nationwide and issuing watches when necessary. Severe Thunderstorm and Tornado watches are typically issued prior to the onset of severe weather and prescribe the geographic area where the storms are expected to occur. A *Warning* means that severe weather is occurring or imminent and those in its path should take appropriate precautions immediately. Warnings are issued by your local National Weather Service office and are typically issued for specific portions of counties and locales, rather than for an entire county.

"Most deaths and injuries related to natural weather disasters are preventable," said Zachary Hargrove, Lead Forecaster at the National Weather Service Office in Bismarck. "Be sure to have a reliable way to receive warnings, such as a NOAA Weather Radio, and create/implement a severe weather plan for you and your family. Know that at the National Weather Service, we are here 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, monitoring the weather and working hard to keep you safe."

Severe weather safety is mostly just common sense. Simple things like parking your car in the garage and taking shelter inside a sturdy building will protect you and your property from most severe weather situations. When strong winds or hail are involved, stay away from windows, as broken glass can cause significant injuries. The most effective protection from lightning is inside a building or vehicle. If caught outside, squat down on your feet, to make yourself as small as possible. You don't want to be the tallest object in the area, but on the other hand, don't take shelter under a tall tree; if it is struck, you may be as well. Never drive through flooded areas, especially fast-moving water, as your vehicle could be swept away. A flooded road may also hide the fact that its structurally unsafe or washed out entirely.

The most spectacular phenomenon spawned by thunderstorms is the tornado. If faced with a tornado, take shelter in a small interior room on the lowest level of a sturdy building. Abandon mobile homes and automobiles for more substantial shelter as they provide very little, if any protection. If you are caught outside, lie down in a ditch or depression and cover your head.

Being aware of potentially hazardous weather conditions and taking appropriate action will help keep you safe from the storm. Have a safe and enjoyable summer!

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