



Safety Information Briefing
Employee Safety and Health Team
Larry Grimes – Safety Team Leader
Hurricane Katrina & Rita Emergency Response

Date: September 27, 2005

Tornados: General Information and Personal Safety

What you don't know - you don't know about tornados! Several IMTs have had to deal with tornados so we are providing the following general information for planning and safety purposes.

A tornado is a violently rotating column of air in contact with the ground. It is produced when cool dry air from the mid levels of the atmosphere and warm moist air from the surface interact inside of a mature thunderstorm cell. If the sky takes on a greenish tint, beware. This is often an indication that a tornado is imminent. Tornados are often shrouded in rain, making them nearly impossible to see. Hail that gradually increases in size is often a sign that a storm has the potential to produce a tornado.

Thunderstorms that produce tornados are often associated with roaring noises. If a thunderstorm produces a noise that sounds like a jet engine or a freight train, chances are that a tornado is nearby. Although tornados are most common in May and June, they can strike and have struck in every month of the year, are frequently associated during land-fall of tropical storms and hurricanes. The frictional drag that a tropical storm experiences as its outer rain bands move ashore is enough to conceive the spinning column of air that eventually gives birth to a tornado. Tornados that do not touch the ground are referred to as funnel clouds. A **tornado watch** is issued when weather conditions favor the formation of tornados, for example during a severe thunderstorm. A **tornado watch** is issued when a tornado funnel is sighted or indicated by weather radar. Here are some things to consider for safety during tornados:

- Stay alert to changing weather conditions. NOAA weather reports and tornado warnings can be received on incident radios on the following frequencies – 162.400 to 162.550, in .025 increments (7) sites.
- In camps, distribution centers, offices and other support facilities, have a plan of action in case a tornado warning is issued. Many Teams have already had to react to such warnings.
- Go to a tornado shelter, an interior room on the lowest floor, and move under a sturdy table or workbench. In taller buildings, stay in central stairwells. Bathrooms, small interior closets, and maintenance rooms on the lowest floors with short walls also provide some protection.
- Avoid open free-spanned rooms such as gymnasiums, shopping complexes, theaters, warehouses, and enclosed sporting arenas. Leave mobile homes for a sturdy shelter.
- In the open, the best place is in a ditch if there is no rain. However, flash flooding may pose a serious threat if rain is falling. Do not try to outrun a tornado in your vehicle. Leave your vehicle for sturdy shelter.

Tornados are definitely a serious safety concern and teams need to complete evacuation planning. The key is early warning; establish contacts with local individuals that can provide assistance with tornado warnings and avoidance measures.

Additional information can be found at the following sites:

<http://www.tornadoproject.com/safety/safety.htm>

<http://www.fema.gov/hazards/tornados/tornado.shtm>

<http://www.spc.noaa.gov/faq/tornado/safety.html>

Contact: Jeff Scussel 678-441-5125 or Denver Ingram 678-320-3008