



AMERICA'S
PrepareAthon!
BE SMART. TAKE PART. PREPARE.

PREPARE YOUR PEOPLE FOR TORNADO SAFETY

K-12 SCHOOLS



The bottom half of the image shows a perspective view of a paved road with a white dashed center line leading towards a dark, stormy horizon. On the right side of the road, there are several houses. A large, dark, swirling tornado is visible on the left side of the road, with debris flying through the air. Multiple bright lightning bolts are striking the houses and the ground on the right side of the road.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone has a role to play in preparing for a disaster. This day of action guide, *Prepare Your People for Tornado Safety*, is designed to help you improve your teachers, staff, and students' readiness for a tornado by moving them to take action. It provides guidance on how to hold a tornado preparedness discussion and conduct a short drill as a day of action for your school or school district. Many individuals within your school can lead this effort; you may be a principal, a teacher, or someone involved in administration or facilities, or another program. Please see *A Playbook for Your Day of Action: K–12 Schools* for information and resources to make implementation easy.

America's PrepareAthon! also offers the *Prepare Your Organization for Tornado Safety: K–12 Schools* day of action guide to help assess and improve your ability to maintain or re-establish operations when affected by a tornado.

TORNADO PREPAREDNESS

Tornadoes may strike quickly, with little or no warning. To be prepared for a tornado, it's important to be ready to act quickly. This means knowing where to go for the best available protection during a tornado, monitoring alerts and warnings information, and having a family communication plan. The *How to Prepare for a Tornado* guide provides additional information on tornado basics, how to protect yourself, and what steps to take now.

BEFORE YOUR DAY OF ACTION

- Review the America's PrepareAthon! *How to Prepare for a Tornado* guide at www.ready.gov/prepare to understand key terms and levels of protection.
- Use the *Be Smart. Know Your Alerts and Warnings* worksheet to identify relevant local and national alert systems; and find out what your school uses to monitor severe weather.
- Identify where everyone will go when a tornado strikes. To provide a Safe Room, Storm Shelter, or Best Available Refuge Area, you may need to consult with experts, such as building engineers or architects.
- Post clear, easy-to-read directional signage (in multiple languages if necessary) and explain to teachers, staff, and students where they should go for protection from a tornado.
- Establish procedures for notifying all school occupants when a tornado watch or tornado warning is issued, or whenever they need to take action to protect themselves.
- Review the *Be Smart. Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables* checklist or the more comprehensive Emergency Financial First Aid Kit (EFFAK) at www.ready.gov/financialpreparedness. The EFFAK provides templates to help collect the documentation need after a disaster to get on the road to recovery.
- Review the information at www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs and consider the needs of individuals in your school with access and functional needs.
- If you are sending mock severe weather notifications as a drill on your day of action, identify an individual to manage the drill and coordinate communications about it. Publicize the drill in advance to encourage participation, and visit www.ready.gov/prepare to download free customizable promotional materials.
- Visit www.ready.gov/kids/educators for resources that teachers can use for student activities at all grade levels.
- Add this topic to the agenda of your next PTA or other meeting with parents to talk about the ways in which the school communicates with parents in case of an emergency (e.g., listservs, emails, text messages, website).

HOLD A TORNADO PREPAREDNESS DISCUSSION

Research shows there is a strong relationship between talking about preparedness and taking action.¹ The America's PrepareAthon! tornado preparedness discussion is designed as a short, structured session to emphasize the steps your teachers and staff can take to be ready.

GOALS

- Ensure teachers and staff know where to go for protection from a tornado.
- Ensure teachers and staff know your school's emergency communications plan and procedures.
- Encourage teachers and staff to share their experiences and talk about tornado preparedness with their families, friends, and neighbors.

TIME

15–30 minutes. You can cover the basics in as little as 15 minutes. Half an hour will provide time for more discussion.

SETTING

Consider adding your tornado preparedness discussion to the agenda of your next staff meeting or arranging a brown bag lunch session. Do what works best to get the conversation started.

SUGGESTED AGENDA

Use the *How to Prepare for a Tornado* guide as a reference for the discussion.

1. **Tornado Basics:** Remind teachers and staff that tornadoes are nature's most violent storm, with winds that can reach over 200 miles per hour and with paths of destruction more than one mile wide and 50 miles long. About 1,200 tornadoes hit the United States every year, and every state is at some risk. Most tornadoes in the United States occur east of the Rocky Mountains. Areas with frequent tornadoes are sometimes referred to as a "Tornado Alley." They can strike in any season but happen most often in the spring and summer months. Tornadoes can occur at all hours of the day and night but are most likely to occur between 3 p.m. and 9 p.m.
2. **Alerts and Warnings:** Demonstrate how to sign up for local alerts and stay informed. Explain tornado watches, warnings, and the actions to take for each. Provide teachers and staff with the *Be Smart. Know Your Alerts and Warnings* worksheet, which outlines available alerts, notifications, apps, and other resources available by location and hazard. Share which local and national alert systems your school monitors in the event of severe weather. Encourage everyone to sign up for local text alerts on their phones. Also, discuss how you will receive alerts and notification if the power is out.
3. **Emergency Communications, Policies, and Procedures:** Provide teachers and staff with a copy of your school's emergency policies and procedures, including information about school closures, telecommuting, and communications. Let people know how they will be notified in an emergency (e.g., text alerts, emails, public address system). As appropriate, make sure teachers and staff know your emergency hotline number, know how to access your website for important information during a disaster, and are signed up

¹ *Preparedness in America*, September 2013, www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/71100.

to receive text alerts if they are available. Be sure to include and discuss the needs of individuals with access and functional needs.

4. **Tornado Warning Signs:** Explain what you might see or hear during a tornado and what can happen. Danger signs of a tornado include a rotating, funnel-shaped cloud extending to the ground, a cloud of debris, and a loud roar that is similar to a freight train.
5. **Protective Location(s):** Make sure everyone knows where to go for protection from a tornado. Ensure that people with access and functional needs will have assistance.
6. **Individual and Family Preparedness:** Encourage family preparedness. This includes gathering financial and medical documents and contact information. If something were to happen to the home or to a family member, having access to personal financial, insurance, medical, and other records is crucial for starting the process of recovery quickly and efficiently. Hand out the *Be Smart. Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables* checklist and encourage everyone to note what documents they should collect and keep in a safe place. Refer them to the Emergency Financial First Aid Kit (EFFAK) at www.ready.gov/financialpreparedness for more complete information about the critical personal documents they may need in the event of a disaster.
7. **Student Activities:** Discuss activities and lessons on preparedness that can be incorporated into the students' curriculum. Encourage teachers to visit www.ready.gov/kids and www.ready.gov/publications for tools and resources. Provide the link to the Family Communication Plan, www.ready.gov/kids/make-a-plan, and ask teachers to include this in their lesson plan for the day of action.
8. **Note: If you are conducting a day of action tornado drill:** You may also choose to emphasize personal preparedness by conducting a tornado drill. You can conduct the drill on the same day as your discussion or a few days later. Tell meeting attendees that the upcoming tornado drill will include mock emergency notifications to simulate how the school will communicate with everyone in the event of a tornado and to prompt teachers, staff, students and visitors to practice going to a protective location.

Materials: Have copies of the *How to Prepare for a Tornado* guide, *Be Smart. Protect Your Critical Documents and Valuables*, and *Be Smart. Know Your Alerts and Warnings* as handouts. Email or distribute the links to these as well as to the *Playbook for Individuals and Families* as advance reading or as followup.

CONDUCT A TORNADO DRILL

Conducting a drill with realistic emails of severe weather warnings can help people better imagine what a real tornado would feel like. This kind of practice scenario can make all the difference in motivating people to take action. While being fully prepared may require additional actions, this tornado drill is designed to encourage your teachers, staff, and students to take one simple step now that will help them react and recover faster if a disaster happens. The tornado drill will focus on the important step of practicing what to do in the event of a tornado. This drill will also provide the chance to test your communications systems and identify any necessary improvements so you'll be ready in a real emergency. Included are sample notifications and tips for a post-drill discussion. The drill and followup discussion can be conducted in less than an hour. Although tornadoes usually occur in the afternoon and early evening, you can schedule your drill at any time.

DRILL OVERVIEW

On the day of the drill, the drill coordinator will send a notification through your school's normal messaging channels. The notices provide information about a tornado in the area and instructions to move to designated protective locations. The first notification indicates that there is severe weather in the area, and the second notification informs participants that the National Weather Service has issued a tornado warning.

After sending the two notifications and allowing time for participants to get to the protective location, send an "all clear" message telling participants the drill is over. This final message reminds participants that your school conducted this drill because tornadoes are possible in your area and that it's important to prepare.

The schedule below shows the suggested order of events for the drill.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

Time	Action
1:00 p.m.	Participants receive notification that there is severe weather in the area and a tornado watch has been issued by the National Weather Service.
1:30 p.m.	Participants receive an urgent notification that a tornado warning has been issued. Participants are directed to take immediate action, follow organizational procedures, and move to the closest designated protective location.
1:35 p.m.	Supervisors or other designated authorities conduct a head count and report to the drill coordinator.
1:37 p.m.	Participants receive the "all clear" message. Participants are reminded how important it is to prepare for tornadoes and other emergencies.
1:45–2:00 p.m.	Participants return to classrooms or other work locations. Supervisors hold a short followup discussion about the drill and participants' experiences.

After the drill, give participants an opportunity to offer feedback about their experience. Encourage them to suggest improvements on your school's ability to keep everyone safe during a real tornado. Collect participant feedback through notes from individual or group discussions, electronic or paper surveys, comment cards, or suggestion boxes.

SAMPLE NOTIFICATIONS

The following are samples of notifications you might send to participants before, during, and after the tornado drill. You can customize them with specific details about your school and your area. These notifications can be sent by email, text, or any other means of communication you commonly use. Make sure all communications clearly convey that this is a drill, not an actual tornado.

INTRODUCE AMERICA'S PREPAREATHON! TO TEACHERS AND STAFF

Suggested Timing: One week before the day of the drill

Appropriate for: Text alert, email, letter, intranet, staff meetings

Subject Line: America's [Or your school's name] PrepareAthon! for Tornado Safety

To All Teachers and Staff,

At [Time] on [Date], [Name of school] will participate in America's PrepareAthon!, a national initiative to increase the number of people in America who understand the disasters that could happen in their community and take steps to increase their preparedness. Please plan to take part! It takes less than 30 minutes and could make all the difference for your safety and well-being. Please spread the word to your coworkers and colleagues so they participate as well.

WHAT TO EXPECT

On [Date], teachers, staff, students and visitors from across our school will practice what to do in the event of a tornado. This drill will help you imagine a severe tornado situation, think through how you would respond, and take simple steps to improve your readiness for a tornado. On the day of the drill, you will receive a notification directing you and, as appropriate, your students and/or visitors to move to your designated protective location. You should remain in the protective location until you receive the "all clear" message. Supervisors will ensure that everyone knows where to go. If you do not know your designated protective location, please ask your supervisor prior to the drill.

GET PREPARED

Your personal preparedness is important. The America's PrepareAthon! website includes preparedness guides for different hazards, including *How to Prepare for a Tornado*. Go to www.ready.gov/prepare to read more.

Thank you in advance for participating. We value your safety. If you have questions about America's PrepareAthon! and our participation in this campaign, please contact [Point of contact].

BEGIN DRILL / ANNOUNCE SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WARNING / TORNADO WATCH

Suggested Timing: Send out or announce at 1 p.m. on the day of the drill. (*Beginning at 1 p.m. follow the sample schedule above; you may modify drill notification times to accommodate your class schedule.*) You may also consider coordinating this drill with the timing of the preparedness discussion noted above.

Appropriate for: Email, alert/notification system(s), loudspeaker

Subject Line: THIS IS A DRILL: Severe Thunderstorm Warning/Tornado Watch

Attention Teachers and Staff,

THIS IS A DRILL.

At 1 p.m., the National Weather Service issued a severe thunderstorm warning and a tornado watch for [County] to be in effect until 2 p.m. today.

A line of powerful storms with the potential for tornadoes is expected to move through our area.

*A **tornado watch** means conditions are favorable for tornadoes in your area. You should remain alert for approaching storms and remind yourself and others what actions to take if the situation worsens and a tornado warning is issued. Change your plans, if necessary, to be near your best available protection should a tornado warning be issued.*

Please monitor your email or other communication devices, confirm where you should go for protection, and be prepared to take immediate action if necessary.

ISSUE TORNADO WARNING

Suggested Timing: Send out or announce at 1:30 p.m. on the day of the drill.

Appropriate for: Email, alert/notification system(s), loudspeaker

Subject Line: THIS IS A DRILL: Tornado Warning

Attention Teachers and Staff,

THIS IS A DRILL.**TAKE SHELTER IMMEDIATELY.**

At 1:28 p.m., the National Weather Service issued a tornado warning for [County], effective until 2 p.m. Tornadoes, hail 1.5 inches in diameter, strong winds in excess of 90 miles per hour, and dangerous lightning are possible with this storm.

Please take your class and move IMMEDIATELY to your protective location and remain there until you receive the "all clear" message.

*A **tornado warning** means a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar and you should get to a protective location IMMEDIATELY!*

END DRILL / ANNOUNCE ALL CLEAR

Suggested Timing: Send out or announce at 1:37 p.m.

Appropriate for: Email, alert/notification system(s), loudspeaker

Subject Line: THIS IS A DRILL: All Clear

Attention Teachers and Staff,

THE TORNADO DRILL IS OVER.

You are all clear.

Please return to your **classrooms** and check in with your supervisor to provide your feedback.

We conducted this drill because tornadoes are possible in this area and it's important to prepare.

[Name of school] monitors weather conditions and will continue to inform teachers and staff of changing weather conditions that could impact our area.

We hope you took a moment to sign up for local alerts and warnings and to familiarize yourself with our emergency policies and procedures. Please take this opportunity to talk with your family about what you would need in order to be prepared for a tornado and other possible disasters. Thank you for taking part!

To learn more about simple steps that will help you survive and recover from tornadoes and other major disasters, visit www.ready.gov/prepare.

CONDUCT A POST-DRILL DISCUSSION

After your day of action, ask participants to give feedback on their experiences. It is generally best if this can occur within a week of the exercise to keep the experience fresh. Encourage them to offer ideas for improving the school's tornado preparedness. Their input is valuable to improving your school's safety. Collect participant feedback through notes from individual or group discussions, electronic or paper surveys, comment cards, or suggestion boxes.

Below is a sample script for a post-drill group discussion. If you prefer, you can also send these questions as a survey or include them on a comment card. You may also want to offer participants a way to provide anonymous feedback.

SCRIPT FOR POST-DRILL GROUP DISCUSSION

Use the list of questions below to get the discussion started. Make sure everyone gets the chance to provide feedback.

It is important to pay attention to the emotional reactions of participants during the discussion. If you notice anyone expressing discomfort or anxiety, adjust the conversation to minimize the participant's discomfort. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Disaster Technical Assistance Center provides a host of materials for use when discussing disasters. These materials are available at www.samhsa.gov/dtac.

FACILITATOR: Thank you for your participation in our America's PrepareAthon! day of action to be better prepared for possible disasters. I want to take a few minutes to talk about the drill and what we learned today, as well as what we can do for the future. Your comments and feedback may be shared with our administration as we continue to improve our ability to prepare for tornadoes.

1. What did you think of the drill?
2. What did you learn?
3. What are some of the strengths or weaknesses regarding how we communicated with you about the drill and the information we provided?
4. In a real disaster, would you be able to get in touch with your family? Do you know the emergency plans and policies of your children's school(s)?
5. What are some things you plan to do over the next couple of weeks to make yourself and your family better prepared to act if you need to seek protection from a tornado?
6. What are some next steps we should take as a school to improve our preparedness?

FACILITATOR: Does anyone have anything else they would like to add before we conclude? I want to thank each of you for participating in this drill. We are committed to your safety and will provide updates on any changes we make as a result of the drill or other preparedness planning. We also encourage everyone to talk about tornado preparedness with your families, friends, and neighbors. Thank you.