

FACT SHEET: SEVERE THUNDERSTORMS

Severe thunderstorms frequently visit Iowa year. Each year on average Iowa sees about 48 tornadoes, tens of flash flood events, hundreds of severe thunderstorms and thousands of non-severe thunderstorms.

By definition, a severe thunderstorm must contain hail that is one inch in diameter or larger, straight line winds of 58 mph or stronger and/or a tornado. The National Weather Service issues severe thunderstorm and tornado watches and warnings for severe thunderstorms.

Thunderstorm safety...What you can do!

BEFORE THE STORM

- Know the county in which you live and the names of nearby major cities. Severe weather warnings are issued by counties.
- Check the weather forecast before leaving to be outdoors for extended periods.
- Watch for signs of approaching storms.
- If a storm is approaching, keep a NOAA weather radio or AM/FM radio with you.
- Postpone outdoor activities if thunderstorms are imminent. This is your best way to avoid being caught in a dangerous situation.
- Check on those who have trouble taking shelter if severe weather threatens.

WHEN THUNDERSTORMS APPROACH

- If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to the storm to be struck by lightning. Go to safe shelter immediately!
- Move to a sturdy building or car. Do not take shelter in small sheds, under isolated trees or in convertible automobiles.
- If lightning is occurring and a sturdy shelter is not available, get inside a hard-top automobile and keep the windows up.
- Get out of boats and away from water.
- Telephone lines and metal pipes can conduct electricity. Unplug appliances not necessary for obtaining weather information. Avoid using the telephone or any electrical appliances. Use phones only in an emergency.
- Do not take a bath or shower.
- Turn off air conditioners. Power surges from lightning can overload the compressors.

IF CAUGHT OUTDOORS AND NO SHELTER IS NEARBY

- Find a low spot away from trees, fences and poles. Make sure the place you pick is not subject to flooding.
- If you are in the woods, take shelter under the shorter trees.
- If you feel your skin tingle or your hair stand on end, squat low to the ground on the balls of your feet. Place your hands on your knees with your head between them. Make yourself the smallest target possible and minimize your contact with the ground.
- If you are boating or swimming, get to land and find shelter immediately!