

National Weather Service Weather Forecast Office Rapid City, SD

Severe Thunderstorms & Tornadoes

Thunderstorms are an almost-daily occurrence in the Black Hills region during the summer; they occasionally spawn tornadoes, strong winds, large hail, and lightning. Have a storm safety plan and follow safety guidelines to protect yourself from these hazards.

At home and work:

- Identify safe places to go during storms. A basement or interior room on the lowest floor such as a closet or bathroom without windows is best. Mobile home residents who do not have a community shelter should make plans to go to the nearby home of a friend or relative before storms develop. If you are building or remodeling a home, consider adding a "Safe Room" to serve as a tornado shelter. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has [Safe Room](#) plans.
- Assemble emergency supplies, including: Flashlight and extra batteries, battery-powered radio, weather radio receiver, corded telephone, nonperishable food and water (three gallons per person), first-aid supplies, extra clothing, and bedding. Don't forget special items for family members such as diapers, baby formula, prescription or essential medications, extra eyeglasses or hearing aids, and pet supplies.
- Know how to shut off electric, gas, and water utilities.
- Know the county in which you live, surrounding counties, and nearby towns. Have a map available so you know where storms are and if they are moving toward your location.
- Know how to get warning information; such as NOAA Weather Radio, local radio and television stations, and cable TV (storm warnings are not broadcast on satellite TV unless you are watching local stations). Learn if your community has warning sirens and when they are used and remember they are an outdoor warning system and are not intended to be heard indoors.

When traveling or outdoors:

- Plan outdoor activities for the morning or early afternoon when thunderstorms are less likely. Check the weather forecast before a trip or going outside. Postpone outdoor activities if severe thunderstorms are forecast or a watch is in effect.
- Check if a shelter is available or locate buildings in which you can take cover quickly.
- Start at the farthest or most remote location and move toward a shelter so you will be closer if storms develop.
- Monitor NOAA Weather Radio or a local radio station for updated forecasts, watches, and warnings.
- Keep track of the counties, towns, and major highways along your route so you will know if you are heading toward a storm.
- Watch the skies.

Thunderstorms can intensify rapidly and tornadoes can develop quickly-you may not have much time to escape. When a storm approaches or a warning is issued, take cover quickly.

- Go to the basement or a small interior room on the ground floor. Get under the stairwell or a heavy table and cover yourself with pillows or blankets. Stay away from windows and exterior walls!
- Do NOT open windows! Strong winds and flying debris may injure you.
- If you live in a mobile home, go to your designated shelter or a permanent structure. If you don't have time, lie flat in a ditch or ravine away from the home and protect yourself with pillows or blankets.
- Leave large rooms with high ceilings, large windows, and skylights; such as gymnasiums, church sanctuaries, or industrial buildings. Go to an interior room or hallway on the lowest floor. Use the stairs, not the elevator.
- Do not try to drive away from a tornado or take cover under a highway overpass. If there are no buildings nearby, find a low area away from your vehicle clear of potential debris like trees and power lines and not likely to fill with water from heavy rain. Lie flat and cover your head. Learn more about the [dangers of overpasses](#).
- When heavy rain, hail, and strong winds reduce visibility; stop driving. Protect yourself from flying debris or hailstones that can break your car windows.
- If you are on a lake, head for shore immediately!

Download the color brochure "[Thunderstorms, Tornadoes, Lightning...Nature's Most Violent Storms](#)" published by the American Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and National Weather Service.

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