

# Tornadoes



A tornado is defined as a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground.

Tornadoes are capable of tremendous destruction with wind speeds of 250 mph. Damage paths can be in excess of one mile wide and 50 miles long.

Kansas tornadoes have the potential to be the most violent. These violent tornadoes comprise about two percent of tornado occurrences. The National Weather Service in Topeka started keeping statistics in 1950 and Kansas has averaged 53 tornadoes annually. The most tornadoes recorded were in 1991 when 116 tornadoes were documented throughout the state.

## Tornado Myths

- Areas near rivers, lakes, and mountains are safe from tornadoes.
- The low pressure with a tornado causes buildings to "explode" as the tornado passes overhead.
- Windows should be opened before a tornado approaches to equalize pressure and minimize damage.

## Tornado Facts

- No place is 100% guaranteed to be safe from a tornado.
- Violent winds and debris slamming into buildings cause most structural damage.
- Opening windows allows damaging winds to enter the structure. Instead, go to a safe place.

## Tornado Safety Indoors

- Have a pre-designated safety spot.
- Go to the lowest level possible in a structure.
- Put as many walls between you and the outside as you can.
- Avoid windows and glass.
- In a basement stay under the center support beam, a stairwell, or heavy piece of furniture for protection from falling debris. Stay out of corners; debris often collects in corners.
- If you have no area below ground level, utilize a hallway closing doors off to outside rooms. Any small interior room (a bathroom or closet) away from outside walls and windows would be preferable to large rooms or rooms with outside walls.

## Tornado Safety Outside and In Homes of Modular Construction

- Get to a safe shelter if possible.
- Do not try to outrun a tornado in your car.
- If you are caught in the open, leave a vehicle and go to a low-lying area such as a ditch or ravine. Lie flat and cover your head.
- Mobile homes offer little protection from tornadoes. They should be abandoned.
- The installation of a safe room can drastically increase your protection. A safe room is a small windowless shelter, such as a closet or a bathroom, which is readily accessible from all parts of your home. It is best to have a safe room put in when constructing a new house; but they can be added afterwards as well. The safe room creates a designated safe zone so that everyone knows where to go in case there is a need to seek shelter. [Learn more about a Safe Room.](#)