



# HOW TO CONDUCT A CHURCH TORNADO DRILL

A guide to plan, conduct, and evaluate a tornado drill at your church



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TORNADO

# BEFORE THE DRILL

## WHY SHOULD WE CONDUCT TORNADO DRILLS?

*“Tornadoes are nature’s most violent storm, with winds that can reach over 200 miles per hour and with paths of destruction of more than one mile wide and 50 miles long.” —FEMA.gov*

The National Weather Service defines a tornado as a violently rotating column of air, pendant from a thunderstorm cloud that touches the ground.

Injuries and fatalities are most commonly caused by falling or flying debris. Understanding weather signs and knowing what to do in case of severe weather can help you protect the members and guests at your church if a storm arises during church services.

### PREPARATION IS PART OF THE DRILL

If your region falls into the tornado moderate to high risk categories, mitigation will help to decrease the amount of damage and keep members safe. Tornadoes can bring a city or a region to a standstill. Destroyed buildings, fallen trees and blocked roadways lend confusion to the situation. Downed power lines can mean no electricity, air conditioning or heat. Communication services may be unavailable for days.

## HERE IS YOUR PLANNING CHECKLIST:

- Review your written Emergency Plan.
- Discuss your plans and receive approval for the drill with your pastor, church board and safety committee.
- Create a crisis response team. This team might include several people with law enforcement or military and medical training. Designate duties for your crisis team members which include:
  - Directing congregants to pre-determined safe areas in the building.
  - Assisting individuals with limited mobility, children or guests unfamiliar with the procedure.
  - Reuniting children with parents after the tornado passes and it is safe.
  - Assisting anyone who may be trapped or too frightened to move themselves to safety.
  - Follow-up after the crisis in assuring everyone is secure.
- Conducting a safe check of the facility after the tornado to determine damage, whether utilities need to be shut off, treating injuries, reuniting family members, etc.
- Find an alarm to use on the day of your drill to simulate the outdoor siren that will be activated by local officials in the event of a real tornado.
- Make sure that all church leaders are registered to receive emergency alerts from local weather and media channels, including tornado warnings. Encourage church members to also register for these alerts.
- Designate one of your church leaders to meet with local emergency personal to review the strategy for responding to a tornado in your area. You can also give them the date you choose to conduct the drill.
- Share the emergency plan with your congregation so that they know what to do when the alarm sounds.
- Assign individuals to observe the drill and report back any problems they noted.

# CONDUCTING THE DRILL

*Announce to the congregation a week or two before the drill of your intent to conduct a tornado drill. Tell them when the drill will take place, and what is expected of them. This is especially important if this will be the first drill. Unannounced drills should only be performed once the congregation is comfortable with what to do when the alarm sounds.*

## EDUCATE YOUR CONGREGATION

- 1** Remind congregants during a tornado, remaining in a building is safer than evacuating. Say: “When you hear the siren, you will be directed to **MOVE** into one of the interior rooms or a hallway. Shield your head and neck with your arms. If you cannot do that, seek **COVER** under a pew, desk, or table and protect your head and neck with your arms. **STAY AWAY** from windows, doors, outside walls and corners.”
  - 2** Sound an alarm to simulate the siren. In a real tornado situation, the siren will be activated by city officials or local emergency personnel.
  - 3** Have a designated person from your crisis response team walk to the front and announce to the congregation that a tornado drill is now in progress and share the following:  
*“We request that everyone take part in this tornado drill and follow emergency procedures. Your participation and cooperation will help ensure that our plan is safe and workable, and that everyone knows what to do in case of an emergency. Please remain calm and make space for those in wheelchairs and anyone needing special assistance.”*
  - 4** Start your timer to evaluate how long it takes for everyone to find a safe location.
  - 5** Have members of your crisis response team direct congregants to the designated safe areas and watch and assist those needing assistance.
  - 6** Have a designated member of your crisis response team sweep the building to be sure all are in a safe location.
  - 7** Wait until everyone is in a safe location. Stop the timer. The first drill will take longer because it is new to everyone. As you practice and conduct more drills, response time will decrease.
  - 8** Announce the end of the drill. Remind your congregation that in a real tornado situation, the crisis response team will be monitoring local weather alerts for updates and will announce when it is safe to come out of their safe location.
  - 9** Allow the congregation to return to their seats.
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# AFTER THE DRILL



- Ask for feedback from the congregation and those who assisted with the drill.
- Identify problems and weaknesses.
- Make notes of what went well and what didn't. Your record should include:
  - *The date and time of the drill.*
  - *Name of the person who conducted the drill.*
  - *Elapsed time required to move everyone to safe locations.*
  - *Notes and observations regarding problems with the drill or areas of needed improvement.*
- Maintaining records and other notes will provide you with the benefit of information gleaned from past events.
- After reviewing all notes, revise your emergency response plan as needed. Don't forget to set the date of your next drill!

Remember to vary the time of the drills. Schedule them before, during, and after Sabbath School, the announcement period, and the worship service. You might plan one for a midweek service at night. Emergency situations can happen at any time, so be prepared.

## ARM CARES

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