

FYI on the message below. Bottom line is the Red Cross and The Weather Channel have changed their safety guidelines informing people to remain in their vehicles during a tornado rather than seeking shelter in a ditch. This is NOT the NWS position and we will not be changing our calls to action.

Against recommendations of NWS, the Red Cross announced a change to their tornado safety guidance on Wednesday. Here is their new guidance: <http://www.semoredcross.org/tornadochecklist.pdf>. On the bottom of the center section they now recommend:

If you are caught outdoors, seek shelter in a basement, shelter, or sturdy building. If you cannot get to shelter, a recent study* suggests doing the following:

- Get into a vehicle, buckle your seat belt, and try to drive at right angles to the storm movement and out of the path.
- **If strong winds and flying debris occur while you are driving, pull over and park, keeping seat belts on and the engine running. Put your head down below the windows, covering with your hands and a blanket if possible.**
- If you are unable to get to a building or vehicle, as a last resort, lie in a ditch or depression and cover your head with your hands.

* Schmidlin T., et al, 2002: *Unsafe at any (wind) speed?* American Meteorological Society, 1821-30.

The text that I highlighted in red is really the change from previous safety guidance. They partnered with The Weather Channel on the announcement Wednesday evening and have initially received positive feedback from the TWC (not necessarily TWC customers) on this change.

Below you will find the information that our folks in Norman crafted with NOAA Public Affairs to address this issue. Please provide this to your staffs, especially your Public Service unit folks, so that they have it available to answer questions/concerns from the public and to address interviews with your local news media. Please forward national media outlet (CNN, TWC, etc.) interview requests on this issue to your Regional Public Affairs Officer.

Question: The Red Cross recently published "tear sheets <<http://www.semoredcross.org/tornadochecklist.pdf>>" that included a new tornado safety precaution, "If strong winds and flying debris occur while you are driving, pull over and park, keeping seat belts on and the engine running. Put your head down below the windows covering your hands and a blanket if possible." What is the NWS position on this new tornado safety precaution?

Answer: Our position hasn't changed - people need to plan for weather emergencies like tornadoes in advance by identifying a safe shelter, such as a basement, storm cellar, or safe room, now - before bad weather strikes. They need to get a NOAA Weather Radio so they will be alerted when a tornado is in their area. If they hear a tornado warning, it means a tornado is threatening their life and they should immediately head to their safe shelter, not wait until they can see a tornado. Mobile homes, vehicles and outside are not safe places to be during a tornado. If people plan in advance, they will not be forced to make a life or death decision on the fly. If a tornado is threatening and people are caught outdoors or in a vehicle, they should always seek sturdy shelter - even if it means knocking on the door of a stranger.

Just for everyone's awareness, FEMA also will be impacted by the Red Cross' tornado safety change: http://www.fema.gov/hazard/tornado/to_during.shtm <http://www.fema.gov/hazard/tornado/to_during.shtm%20/> . I'm sure many state EMAs also have tornado safety information that will come under scrutiny now (or at least generate questions from the media/public). We are also aware that several of you have already been contacted by the media/public on this issue.

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