

COMMUNITY CORNER

Prepare now for severe weather

By Col. Kevin Brown
GARRISON COMMANDER

It's time to get ready for severe weather in Kansas. While we hope to pass through spring and into summer tornado free, it's best to be prepared for whatever Mother Nature sends our way. As the Ready Army campaign encourages us, get a kit, make a plan and be informed. I encourage each of you to do that as we come to the end of Kansas Severe Weather Awareness Week.

KANSAS WEATHER

For all of you new to Kansas, we experienced 103 tornadoes in 2009 - 43 above the average of 60 per year. The Kansas tornado season ended early in 2009. No tornadoes were reported during the last four months of the year. In the past 60 years, only 11 other years have not had a tornado report after Sept. 1.

Even though 2009 was not a record-breaking year for tornadoes in the state of Kansas, numerous other high impact weather events occurred, causing millions of dollars in damage to homes, property and infrastructure. Those events included blizzards, straight line winds, numerous severe thunderstorms, flooding and flash flooding. Short of hurricanes, we experience all Mother Nature has to offer in Kansas.

During 2007 and 2008, we set records for the numbers of tornadoes in Kansas with 141 and 178 in these years respectively. On the night of June 11, 2008, a single supercell thunderstorm spawned two tornadoes in the region. In Chapman, a tornado that was up to a half-mile wide and rated EF3, almost leveled the entire town. Several blocks of homes, both of the community's schools and two churches were completely destroyed.

The same supercell thunderstorm then spawned another tornado that touched down just northeast of Ogdens. As it moved through the west side of Manhattan and into residential neighborhoods, the quarter-mile-wide tornado produced EF4 damage. The tornado destroyed recently constructed homes and damaged homes in other established neighborhoods in Manhattan. The tornado continued to move across the city and produced damage along its path that included the Kansas State University campus.

ALERTS

This week is the ideal time for Families to make sure they are prepared



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for severe weather. Develop a plan and practice it. Everyone should know what to do when severe weather strikes when they are at home, work, school, outdoors or other public locations they frequent.

We live with the threat of severe

weather year-round. Fort Riley has spent more than \$900,000 in the past year to install 20 additional Giant Voice notification towers and two additional tornado sirens.

We also added text messaging alert capability this past fall. Defense Department Common Access Card holders can set up their Families' AtHoc alert account at any of five kiosk locations:

- 1st Infantry Division and Fort Riley Replacement Company, Building 208 on Main Post
- In-processing, Building 210 on Main Post
- ID Card Center, Building 212 on Main Post
- Soldier Readiness Processing Site, Building 7673 on Custer Hill
- Army Community Service, Building 7264 on Custer Hill

Develop a Family disaster plan, learn about the hazards in your area and get a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration all hazards weather radio. Tornado sirens and Giant Voice towers cannot be heard indoors at Fort Riley. Having a weather radio is like having a personal tornado siren in your home or vehicle. Program the radio for your county and the surrounding counties to receive severe weather warnings and information that can provide peace of mind or alert you to danger.

If you have a weather radio, now is a great time to replace the back-up battery so you get severe weather information if the power goes out. Many weather radios also have a charging function for cell phones. If yours doesn't, make sure to have a car charger for your cell phone in the event your power goes out.

TAKING SHELTER

During a severe weather warning, due to high winds, tornadoes or hail, we typically have no more than 10 minutes to seek shelter. That's pretty scary when you think about it, because most of us are more than 10 minutes from home if we're out and about.

If you are in a building, immediately

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

If a tornado "watch" is issued for your area, it means that a tornado is "possible."

If a tornado "warning" is issued, it means that a tornado has actually been spotted, or is strongly indicated on radar, and it is time to go to a safe shelter immediately.

take shelter in the designated tornado shelter, basement or a first floor interior room with no windows. If you cannot get outside during the duty day, you can and should seek shelter in any occupied building. Organizations must allow anyone seeking shelter access to their facilities.

If you're outside during non-duty hours, shelter locations are identified across the installation. These locations are open 24 hours a day and allow people caught outside walking, jogging or driving to seek shelter during high wind, tornado or hail warnings.

Shelters are located at Custer Hill, Camp Funston, Main Post, Marshall Army Airfield and Camp Whiteside.

READY ARMY

The Ready Army program provides information and resources to help Army Families, civilians and contractors prepare for severe weather. Ready Army encourages all of us to "Get a Kit, Make a Plan and Be Informed." Click the Ready Army link on Fort Riley's Web site, www.riley.army.mil, to learn more about getting a kit, making a plan and what to do in and after an emergency. Another site for tornado safety information is <http://www.tornadoprevention.com/safety/safety.htm>.

Outside at Fort Riley, you'll hear the emergency warning signal of a siren in case of a tornado. At that time you should immediately seek shelter and turn on your weather radio to one of the following local radio stations: Junction City KJCK AM 1420, and KJCK FM 97.5; Manhattan KMAN AM 1350, KMKF FM 101.5, and KQLA FM 104.0; Abilene WXL-71 162.525 MHz; Topeka WXK 91 162.475 MHz; or Hillstead KGG 98 162.425 MHz; updates and area-specific information. Please prepare now to keep your Family safe.

If you would like to comment on this article, or suggest a topic to be covered in the Community Corner, e-mail riley.post.newspaper@conus.army.mil.

FOR YOUR SAFETY

Thunderstorms can be deadly

By Tasha Jones
GARRISON SAFETY OFFICE

Thunderstorms can launch one of nature's most magnificent shows, at the same time proving to be deadly. Dangers associated with thunderstorms can include lightning, hail, heavy rain, flooding, strong winds associated with downbursts, straight-line winds and tornadoes.

Each year, many people are killed or seriously injured by severe thunderstorms despite advance warning. While some did not hear the warning, others heard the warning and chose to ignore it. Once you receive a warning or observe threatening skies, you must make the decision to take shelter before the storm arrives. It could be the most important decision you will ever make.

According to the National Weather Service, about 45,000 thunderstorms occur each day around the world. The United States experiences about 100,000 thunderstorms annually, of which, about 10 percent are classified as severe.

Severe thunderstorms also might prompt the National Weather Service to issue watches and warnings for tornadoes and floods. The National Weather Service classifies a severe thunderstorm as being capable of producing three-quarter-inch hail and having sustained winds of 58 miles per hour or greater.

Are you prepared? Before the storm, develop and practice a plan for you and your family for home, work, school and when outdoors. Have frequent drills. Purchase a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration weather radio with a warning tone and battery back up to receive warnings. Also listen to radio and TV for information. If you are planning

a trip outdoors, listen to the latest forecasts and take necessary precautions. Be prepared for severe weather; protect your family.

Here are a few suggestions on what to do in the event of a severe thunderstorm.

INDOORS

- Stay off the phone. Stay away from windows
- Use flashlights if the power goes out.
- You also may want to unplug appliances and computers.
- Avoid taking a shower or bath. If lightning strikes your house, it may send a current of electricity across metal plumbing throughout the house.
- Maintain direct control of your animals. Many animals are unsettled by thunderstorms and it is more comforting and safe for them to be with you.

WHILE DRIVING

- Pull over. Be sure you're away from tall objects such as trees that could fall due to wind or lightning, and do not clog highway underpasses.
- Turn on your emergency flashers; remain in the car until the storm passes.
- Do not touch any metal objects in the car. Rubber tires provide no protection from lightning. Avoid contact with potential conductors to reduce your chance of being shocked. Although you may be injured if lightning strikes your vehicle, you are much safer inside than outside.
- Avoid flooded roads. Don't drive into water covered roads. As little as six inches of water can cause you to lose control of your vehicle and two

feet of flowing water will carry away most automobiles, including SUVs and pickup trucks.

OUTDOORS

- If you are boating or swimming, get to land, get off the beach and find shelter immediately. Stay away from rivers, lakes and other bodies of water. Water is an excellent conductor of electricity.
- Take shelter in a substantial, permanent, enclosed structure such as a reinforced building. A sturdy building is the safest place to be. Avoid gazebos, rain or picnic shelters, golf carts, baseball dugouts, bleachers, and other isolated structures in otherwise open areas because such places are often struck by lightning.
- If there is no reinforced building in sight, take shelter in a vehicle. Keep the windows closed and avoid convertibles. The steel frame of a hard-topped vehicle provides increased protection if you are not touching metal.
- As a last resort and no suitable structure or vehicle is available, go to a low-lying, open place away from trees, poles or metal objects. Make sure the place you pick is not subject to flooding. Crouch low to the ground on the balls of your feet.
- Stay away from natural lightning rods such as golf clubs, tractors, fishing rods, bicycles and camping equipment. Lightning is attracted to metal and poles or rods.
- If you are isolated in a level field or prairie and you feel your hair stand on end, which indicates that lightning is about to strike, crouch low to the ground on the balls of your feet.

For more preparedness information, click on the Ready Army link on Fort Riley's Web site at www.riley.army.mil.

Do you have a kit?

