



Storm Spotter Safety

Safety First

The essentials of any Storm Spotter report are safety first, then speed and accuracy.

Safety is **always** more important than reporting. The Bureau does not authorize the taking of risks to your safety when performing any of your tasks. You need only report severe thunderstorm damage that you observe as a matter of course, and are under no obligation to alter your normal routine. Spotters are on no account to put themselves in a position of risk to their safety. Please note that the Bureau does not authorize risky conduct such as the chasing of storms. Always bear in mind and act in accordance with all safety instructions provided to you including those detailed below.

Telephones and Lightning

When phoning through a report to the Bureau, wait until the storm has passed, as you can receive a deadly electric shock or deafening sound blast when using a telephone during a thunderstorm. The information you provide is still valuable to forecasters, even with this small time delay. The storm may have already passed your area but other people downwind are still awaiting its arrival. If an emergency occurs requiring the use of a telephone during a storm, keep your call brief, don't touch any metal, brick or concrete, and don't stand in bare feet on concrete or tiled floors.

As long as you follow these procedures, it is safe to use a mobile or cordless phone indoors. However, a mobile or cordless phone should not be used outdoors during a thunderstorm, as holding any object with metallic components increases the risk of being struck by lightning.



Being Prepared

Plan ahead for weather emergencies such as cyclones and violent thunderstorms.

Damage to housing at Merimbula, New South Wales, 16 April 1995, caused by a tornado.
Photograph by Sue Lawrence

Take the time now to choose the best shelter within your home or office. Try to choose a small interior room or stairwell, ideally with walls reinforced with pipes (eg. bathroom) or concrete (eg. basement), on the lowest floor of the building. Make sure everyone concerned knows where to go and what precautions to take (see table below). Also, choose a meeting place where your family can gather after a severe storm, to ensure that you are all safe and accounted for. Make sure your household knows where to go and what precautions to take.

Maintain an emergency pack with battery powered torch and radio, tools for emergency repair, food supplies, first aid, blankets and extra clothing. Keep your car fuel tank full, in case petrol stations close down after a storm.



If a severe thunderstorm warning is issued for your area, consider precautions such as bringing livestock to shelter, putting away loose objects like garden furniture, and parking vehicles under cover. Listen for weather updates and watch the skies. If a threatening storm approaches, bring children and pets indoors and shut windows and doors.



Damage from a weak tornado at Bynoe Haven.

Structures built to the cyclone code are unlikely to experience major damage during a tropical thunderstorm. However, if your house does begin to break up, move to the strongest part of the building. This is usually a stairwell or small interior room (e.g. bathroom or purpose-built cyclone shelter) on the ground floor.

Please read the weather safety precautions which are detailed in the following table.

| EVENT | IN BUILDING | OUTSIDE | IN VEHICLE |
|------------------|---|--|---|
| FLOODING | If house is in low-lying area be prepared to move to higher ground. | Seek shelter. Do not try to walk through flash floods. Keep clear of creeks, culverts and drains. | Avoid driving through flooded areas. If caught there, watch for road washouts and avoid dips and underpasses. |
| LIGHTNING | <p>Close windows and doors and keep away from windows, doors and fireplaces. Don't go outside unless it is absolutely necessary.</p> <p>Before storm hits unplug appliances including radio, television and computers.</p> <p>Do not touch electrical items or fixed telephones during the storm. Do not take a bath (both water and metal are electrical conductors).</p> <p>Provided you follow these other safety precautions, it is safe to use a mobile or cordless phone in a building.</p> | <p>Get inside vehicle or building if possible. Avoid water and objects that conduct electricity (eg. golf clubs, umbrellas, metal fences). Do not use mobile or cordless phones. Do not stay in open space or under tall objects (trees, poles). Pergolas and picnic shelters are unsafe.</p> <p>If no shelter is available <u>crouch down</u>, feet close together with head tucked down. If in a group <u>spread out</u>, keeping people several metres apart.</p> <p>Remember, lightning victims can be revived with CPR even though there is no pulse.</p> | <p>Stay in vehicle with windows closed. Avoid touching metal parts of vehicle. Do not drive: wait. But don't park under trees or other tall objects that may fall over in storm.</p> <p>If you use a mobile or cordless phone, ensure that the vehicle is stationary, that there are no electrical connections (charger, external aerial etc.) between the hand held phone and the car. Remove any electrical hands free attachments from the body.</p> |
| WIND/ TORNADO | <p>Stay inside with doors and windows shut. Stay away from windows, doors, and exterior walls.</p> <p>If building begins to break up, go</p> | <p>Get inside vehicle or building if possible. Stay away from trees and other tall objects that may fall over. Beware of downed power lines.</p> | <p>Stay in vehicle with windows closed. Stop, but don't park under trees or other tall objects that may fall over.</p> <p>Be wary of downed power lines</p> |



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| | stairwell on the lowest floor of the building (bathrooms are often best choice). If possible crouch under heavy furniture. Protect your head with cushion or mattress. | shelter in a building, <u>not a car or caravan</u> . If no shelter is available, lie flat in a low dry spot (ravine or ditch) or under a low bridge. Keep alert for flash floods. Protect your head. As a last resort, hang on tightly to the base of a shrub or small tree. | You should be safe in the car but may receive a shock if you step outside. If a tornado approaches, do not stay in vehicle, and do not try to outrun the tornado by driving. If possible, run to a nearby solid structure (shelter or building). |
| HAIL (RARE IN TROPICS) | Stay away from windows and glass doors. | Seek cover, face away from the wind and protect your head. | Keep head and face away from windows. Put vehicle under cover if possible. |

The information presented here is adapted from "The Storm Spotters Handbook" (Bureau of Meteorology, 1995) and a report by E J Bondarenko & Associates on "Use of Mobile and Cordless Phones During Thunderstorms" (2002).