

Know the Terms

Knowing what each of the following weather terms mean can help keep you and your family safe during inclement weather. Know your terms and what safety precautions you need to take for each.

Flooding

Flash Flood Watch

Conditions are favorable for flash flooding in and close to the watch area. These watches are issued by the weather forecast office and are usually issued six to twenty-four hours in advance of expected flood potential.

Flash Flood Warning

Flash flooding is occurring, imminent or highly likely. A flash flood is a flood that occurs within six hours of excessive rainfall and that poses a threat to life and/or property. Ice jams and dam failures can also cause flash floods. These warnings are issued on a county by county basis by the local weather forecast office and are generally in effect for up to six hours.

Flood Warning

General or area flooding of streets, low-lying areas, urban storm drains, creeks and small streams is occurring, imminent, or highly likely. Flood warnings are issued for flooding that occurs more than six hours after the excessive rainfall. These warnings are issued on a county by county basis by the local weather forecast office and are generally in effect for six to 12 hours.

Thunderstorms

Severe Thunderstorm Watch

Conditions are favorable for the development of severe thunderstorms in and close to the watch area. A severe thunderstorm may contain large damaging hail of 3/4 inch (20 mm) diameter or larger, and/or damaging winds 58 mph (95 km/h or 50 knots) or greater. A tornado is possible.

Severe Thunderstorm Warning

A severe thunderstorm is indicated by Doppler weather radar or sighted by Skywarn spotters. A severe thunderstorm may contain large damaging hail of 3/4 inch (20 mm) diameter or larger, and/or damaging winds 58 mph (95 km/h or 50 knots) or greater.

Tornadoes

Tornado Watch

Issued when conditions are favorable for tornadoes to develop. You should monitor local radio or TV stations to stay informed and to know immediately if a tornado warning is issued.

Tornado Warning

Issued when a tornado has been sighted in the area. Take shelter immediately! New radar technology known as DOPPLER has the ability to detect wind directions that may indicate a tornado; a tornado warning may be issued before one is actually sighted by the public.

Hurricanes

Hurricane Watch

An announcement for specific coastal areas that hurricane conditions are possible within 36 hours.

Hurricane Warning

A warning that sustained winds 74 mph (119 km/hr or 64 kt) or higher associated with a hurricane are expected in a specified coastal area in 24 hours or less. A hurricane warning can remain in effect when dangerously high water or a combination of dangerously high water and exceptionally high waves continue, even though winds may be less than hurricane force.



Top photo by Jonathan Ruchti