



In Iowa's Interest:

Staying Safe in Unpredictable Weather

by Senator Tom Harkin

Earlier this month, tornadoes wreaked havoc in multiple Midwestern states. Most notably, small towns in Indiana, Kansas, and Kentucky were hit by monstrous storms that caused severe destruction. Seeing the aftermath of these storms, I was reminded of the risks that tornadoes and severe weather pose to small towns.

In 1993, I was chief sponsor of legislation greatly broadening what is now called the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. The program and its more recent modifications have provided significant funding to states to undertake risk mitigation projects that help protect communities from future natural disasters. These investments help to improve the structural integrity of key infrastructure and buildings to enhance safety and reduce costly repairs that result from destructive storms, like flooding and high winds from tornadoes.

Knowing how to protect yourself and your family, however, during a storm is an absolute necessity. With the unusually warm and mild winter and an increase in severe storms already this spring, dangerous weather could hit Iowa earlier than normal.

Always remember that the safest place to be is in an underground shelter, basement or safe room. If no underground shelter or safe room is available, a small, windowless interior room or hallway on the lowest level of a sturdy building is the safest alternative.

Here are some further safety tips that can help to keep you and your family safe, provided by **the National Weather Service**:

- Go to the nearest sturdy building or shelter immediately.
- Do not wait until you see the tornado. If you are caught outdoors and cannot make it to a shelter, seek secure cover in a basement, shelter, or sturdy building.

If flying debris occurs while you are driving: pull over, park, and follow these instructions:

- Stay in the car with the seat belt on. Put your head down below the windows, covering it with your hands and a blanket if possible.
- If you can safely get lower than the level of the roadway, exit your car and lie in that area, covering your head with your hands.

Regarding mobile homes:

- Mobile homes are not safe during tornadoes or other severe winds.
- Do not seek shelter in a hallway or bathroom of a mobile home.
- If you have access to a sturdy shelter or a vehicle, abandon your mobile home immediately.

With these tips, I hope you all stay safe and secure whenever a storm is near.

For more information on safety during a severe storm, please visit the national weather service at www.weather.gov, my website at www.harkin.senate.gov, or feel free to call any of my offices in Iowa or Washington, D.C.