April Showers Bring May Flowers and Weather Mayhem

What’s at Stake?

Ah, the beauty of spring, flowers blooming and trees budding. However, this beauty often comes at the expense of strong storms, tornadoes, torrential rain and flooding. If you don’t have a plan and you don’t use your head, you could end up dead. It’s that simple.

What’s the Danger?

More than 1,000 tornadoes occur every year, with the death toll varying depending on how active and serious the tornado season is. It can be under 20 in some years or over 500. That was the tragic reality back in 2011, when 553 people lost their lives.

Tornadoes are fierce, fast and scary but would it surprise you to know that flash flooding is consistently a leading cause of weather-related deaths in the US? Approximately 200 people die each year from flash floods and more than 50 percent of flood-related drownings are vehicle related.

Lightning is another deadly by-product of spring weather. Just like tornadoes and flooding, lightning strikes can happen in any month, but spring is an especially active time. Lightning strikes kill an average of 30 people a year.

How to Protect Yourself

The first step in protecting yourself from spring storms is to be prepared and alert. Pay attention to the sky, weather conditions and weather warnings and alerts.

Put together an emergency supply kit with at least 72 hours’ worth of food and water. It’s not uncommon to be stranded or without

water and electricity for three or more days after a weather emergency.

If the weatherman advises you to take cover, do so immediately! Know where to seek shelter at work and at home. In the case of thunderstorms, protect yourself from the wind, lightning and potential hail. Take shelter inside a building or covered area. Stay away from windows. Remember, even if it’s not raining, you can still be struck by lightning; so get to a safe place quickly if you see lightning.

In the event of a tornado, you want to go to the lowest floor possible. If there is a basement, go to it and crouch down under the stairs if possible. If there isn’t a basement, or you don’t have time to get to one, go to the nearest interior room, such as a closet or bathroom. Stay away from windows. Use a blanket or mattress to protect against flying debris. If possible, try to avoid being in a building with a wide-span roof, such as an auditorium, church or hall. These roofs are vulnerable to collapse in a tornado.

If you’re driving, safely park your car and get to a building. If you can’t get to a building, get away from the car, lie flat and face down in low ground and stay far away from other cars or trees.

Because of snowmelt and heavy rain from thunderstorms, flooding is common in the spring. Just six inches of fast-moving flood water can knock over an adult. People underestimate the force and power of water. It takes only 12 inches of rushing water to carry away a small car and two feet of rushing water can carry away most vehicles. It is NEVER safe to drive or walk into flood waters. The best advice when you come across standing water in the road is “Turn around, don’t drown!”

FINAL WORD

Take time to learn about the spring weather hazards common in your area. With a little forethought, planning and awareness you can reduce the mayhem of spring’s unpredictable and often deadly

weather!