



Virginia Department of Emergency Management News Release

Virginia Department of Emergency Management
10501 Trade Court, Richmond, VA 23236

Bob Spieldenner, VDEM, (804) 674-2400
bob.spieldenner@vdem.virginia.gov

Practice Tornado Safety during Statewide Drill March 16 More than 528,080 have registered to participate

RICHMOND, VA – Tornado drills are not just for schoolchildren. In fact, 16 tornadoes struck Virginia last year and not one of them hit during school hours. All Virginians should practice tornado safety by conducting drills at home, at work and at school. Gov. Bob McDonnell has declared that March 16, 2010 is “Tornado Preparedness Day.”

No part of Virginia is immune from tornadoes. They can hit at any time of the year and at any time of the day. There are two things that every family, business and organization should do to get ready:

1. Get a NOAA Weather Radio with SAME alerts.
2. Participate in the statewide tornado drill Tuesday, March 16, at 9:45 a.m. “NOAA

Weather Radios are the best way of getting tornado warnings,” said Bill Sammler, NWS warning coordination meteorologist. “A network of radio stations broadcasts weather data from the nearest National Weather Service office. When a tornado warning is issued, the Weather Radio sounds an alarm followed by information on where the storm is, which way it’s moving, and telling people in its path to take cover.”

SAME alerts stands for Specific Area Message Encoding, a feature that lets you program your radio for your area. NOAA Weather Radios are available at electronics and sporting goods stores, department stores, boating stores and online. They come in battery-powered models and many also have AM/FM band. Some have strobe lights for the hearing impaired. Prices start at about \$30.

Everyone should practice taking cover from tornadoes. A statewide tornado drill is planned for **Tuesday, March 16, at 9:45 a.m.** On that date, schools, businesses, organizations and families are encouraged to participate in the drill, which is a joint effort of VDEM and the National Weather Service.

At 9:45 a.m., the NWS will send a “test” tornado warning on NOAA Weather Radio. This will prompt radio and television stations to broadcast a test message. Some NOAA Weather Radios will not automatically turn on when receiving a “test” signal, so participants should turn on their radios approximately five minutes before the start of the drill.

“Emergency preparedness is everyone’s responsibility,” said Michael Cline, state coordinator for the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. “Make it part of your family emergency plan to have a tornado drill at least once a year. The more you practice, the better able you will be to respond to an emergency.”

To learn more about conducting a tornado drill, and to register your participation in the March 16 statewide drill, visit www.vaemergency.com. More than 528,080 have registered their participation.

To conduct a tornado drill at work or home, first choose a safe area and let all family members know where they are expected to go. When choosing safe areas, remember that tornadoes strike at all hours. Safe places need to be easy to get to and uncluttered in case of darkness when people may not be fully aware or alert.

- Announce the start of the drill.
- Participants should act as though a tornado warning has been issued for the immediate area or a tornado has been sighted nearby. They should move as quickly as possible to a previously designated tornado safe area.
- Safe areas are basements, or interior rooms, bathrooms, closets or hallways on the lowest level of a building. Stay away from windows.
- Once in a safe area, people should crouch down or sit on the floor, facing down, and cover their head with their hands.
- After everyone is in the protective position, announce that the tornado has passed and the drill is over.
- When the drill is over, discuss the drill and ways to improve it, including notification, safe areas and way to get to them.

#