

Natural Emergencies

Hurricanes are one of nature's most powerful forces. Hurricanes can destroy entire communities in very little time. It is important to learn the terminology used to describe the status of the hurricane and its potential for landfall in Maryland.

If forecasters warn of any of the following, it is important to take the necessary precautions:

- **Hurricane Alert:** the hurricane conditions pose a possible threat to your area over the next 72 hours.
- **Hurricane Watch:** the potential for hurricane conditions is good for your area over the next 36 hours.
- **Hurricane Warning:** the hurricane conditions are expected for your area within the next 24 hours. If you live in an area subject to storm surge or flooding, you may be asked to evacuate. **Begin precautionary action at once.**

When a warning is declared you should put a family protection plan into action and ensure that your disaster supplies are ready. Also prepare your home for the storm. Shutter, board, or tape all windows and remove loose objects from your yard. Finally, fuel your car. Gas stations may not be open after the storm.

Take extreme precaution after the storm. Do not travel unless officials have deemed your area safe. If you were evacuated to a shelter, stay there until officials say it is safe to leave. Avoid disaster areas so that recovery crews can begin clean-up efforts. Avoid downed power lines and report them to your utility company.

Floods

Floods are the most common and widespread of all natural hazards. Some floods take days to develop, but flash floods can result in raging waters very quickly. Everyone should know the terms used to describe flooding conditions. A **flood watch** means flooding is possible. A **flood warning** means flooding is expected.

Before a flood, find out if you live in a flood-prone area. See if check-valves have been installed in your sewer traps. These valves prevent floodwater from backing up in your

sewer drains. Store materials like sandbags, plywood, and plastic sheeting to help protect your home from floodwaters.

Do not walk or drive through floodwater. If your car stalls on a flooded roadway, abandon it and move to higher ground.

After floodwaters have subsided, do not return home until authorities say you can. Be careful entering buildings that have been flooded, and do not enter buildings if floodwaters are higher than the first floor. Pump out basements gradually (about one third of the water per day) to avoid structural damage. Local fire departments generally do not pump out basements.

Tornadoes

Tornadoes can strike the ground with winds of up to 300 miles per hour leaving a wide path of destruction in just seconds. Because a tornado can appear quickly and without warning, learn what to do to protect yourself and your family.

A **tornado watch** means a tornado is possible.

A **tornado warning** means a tornado has been sighted.

If you see a tornado or hear a tornado warning for your area, go to the lowest level or basement and get under something sturdy. Stay away from windows. Take a battery-operated radio with you to your shelter location and listen to the Emergency Alert System for official information. If you are outside when a tornado is sighted, get inside if possible. If shelter is not nearby, lie in a low area or ditch and use your arms to protect your head and neck. **NEVER** try to out drive a tornado. Leave the vehicle and seek shelter in a building, low-lying area, or ditch.

After a tornado hits, be careful when entering buildings. Stay clear of downed power lines.

Winter Storms

Heavy snowfall, extreme cold, and ice can become dangerous. When caught outside during a winter storm, find shelter, try to stay dry, and cover all exposed areas of your body. If in an automobile, stay inside the vehicle. Run the motor for about 10 minutes each hour for heat, open the window for a little fresh air to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, and make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked. Make yourself visible to rescuers, and vigorously move your arms, legs, fingers, and toes from time to time to keep blood circulating. At home or in a building, stay inside. Properly ventilate and use fire safeguards if using an alternate source of heat. Eat and drink. Wear layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing.

National Weather Service Winter Season Terminology

Winter Storm Watch: Adverse winter weather is possible in the watch area.

Winter Storm Warning: Adverse winter weather will occur in the warning area.

Heavy Snow: Accumulation of 6 inches or more in 12 hours, or 8 inches or more in 24 hours.

Blizzard: Sustained winds or frequent gusts up to 35 miles per hour or greater, considerable falling snow and/or blowing snow, reduced visibility to less than ¼ mile for three hours or more.

Snow Removal

When it snows, road crews concentrate on keeping snow emergency routes passable. These roads are cleared to bare pavement as soon as possible after a storm is over. A storm has ended when wind has diminished and temperatures start to rise above freezing.

Plowing generally begins when snow becomes 1 to 3 inches deep and the temperatures indicate that there will be no melting. Even after plowing, snow that has been hard packed by traffic often remains on the street, and the plows are unable to remove it completely. In this type of situation, salt and other melting products are spread to provide adequate traction.

How You Can Help

Clearing driveways and entrances is the responsibility of the property owner. All residential and business owners are responsible for clearing sidewalks on their property. **DO NOT** shovel snow into roadways. Refer to your local ordinances for timelines and penalties. Trucks cannot plow through if vehicles are parked on the street. When a storm is predicted, always park your vehicles in the driveway.

Heat Wave Safety Tips

- **Slow down.** Strenuous activities should be reduced, eliminated, or rescheduled to the coolest time of the day. Individuals at risk due to medical problems should stay in the coolest place available, not necessarily indoors.
- **Dress for summer.** Wear loose, lightweight, and light-colored clothing that reflects heat and sunlight and helps the body maintain normal temperatures.
- **Reduce consumption of foods that increase metabolic heat production,** like protein, that also increase water loss.
- **Drink plenty of water,** even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid drinks with sugar, caffeine, or alcohol. Individuals with epilepsy or heart, kidney, or liver disease, who are on fluid restrictive diets, or have a fluid retention problem, should consult a physician before increasing their water consumption.
- **Do not drink alcoholic beverages.**
- **Do not take salt tablets unless specified by a physician.** Those on salt-restrictive diets should consult a physician before increasing their salt intake.
- **Spend more time in air-conditioned places.** Air conditioning in homes and other buildings greatly reduces your danger from heat. If you cannot afford an air conditioner, spend some time each day during hot weather in an air-conditioned environment.
- **Do not get too much sun.**

Heat Disorder Symptoms and Treatment

- **Sunburn:** Redness and pain. Severe cases may result in swelling of the skin, blisters, fever, and/or headaches. Use over-the-counter sunburn relief preparations for mild cases. If blisters appear, do not break. If the blisters do break, apply a dry sterile dressing. For serious cases, consult a physician.
- **Heat Cramps:** Painful muscle spasms may occur in the legs and/or abdomen. Use firm pressure on cramping muscles, or gentle massage to relieve the spasms. Give sips of water to replace water lost through sweating. Discontinue water if nausea occurs.
- **Heat Exhaustion:** Heavy sweating, weakness, skin is cold, pale, and clammy. Pulse is weak and shallow. Normal temperature is possible. Fainting and vomiting may occur. Get victim out of the sun. Lay him/her down and loosen clothing. Apply wet, cool cloths.
- **Heat Stroke:** High body temperature (106 degrees Fahrenheit or higher). Skin is hot and dry. Pulse is rapid and strong. Possible unconsciousness.

HEAT STROKE IS A SEVERE MEDICAL EMERGENCY. *Call 911 for emergency medical assistance. Get the victim to the hospital. Until help arrives, move victim to a cooler environment, reduce body temperature with cool, damp cloths or sponges, use fans or air conditioning, and do not give any fluids. Repeat cooling process if the victim's body temperature rises again.*