



THE ATMOSPHERIC RESERVOIR

Examining the Atmosphere and Atmospheric Resource Management

Get ready for summer weather

By Darin Langerud

As the calendar is flipped to the month of May, the likelihood of hearing the familiar rumble of thunder rises along with the temperature. Summer's longer and warmer days help provide the energy the atmosphere needs to produce some of Mother Nature's most impressive displays.

While thunderstorms are awesome to watch, they are a double-edged sword, producing the majority of growing season precipitation in North Dakota, but also bringing severe weather which may include lightning, hail, floods, high winds, or even tornadoes.

There are a number of things you can do to protect yourself and your property from severe summer weather. The first, and probably most important, boils down to one thing: awareness. Everyone is familiar with the watches and warnings that are issued in advance of severe weather. A *Watch* means conditions are favorable for the development of severe weather in the affected area. The Storm Prediction Center (<http://www.spc.noaa.gov>), located in Norman, Oklahoma, is responsible for forecasting severe weather nationwide and issuing watches when necessary. Severe Thunderstorm and Tornado watches are typically issued prior to the onset of severe weather and prescribe the geographic area where the storms are expected to occur. A *Warning* means that severe weather is occurring and those in its path should take appropriate precautions immediately. Warnings are is-

sued by your local National Weather Service office and are typically issued for specific counties and locales.



A good way to monitor the potential or occurrence of severe weather is with a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio. These commercially-available radios tune into the NOAA Weather Radio network, providing severe weather watches, warnings, and general weather information 24 hours a day. Most importantly, the radios automatically alert you, day or night, if severe weather is threatening your area. Seventeen transmitters in North Dakota and an additional seven in neighboring states provide NOAA radio coverage for most of North Dakota. There are range limitations on the transmitters, however, so not all of the state is covered.

Severe weather safety is mostly just common sense. Simple things like parking your car in the garage and taking shelter inside a sturdy building will protect you and your property from most severe weather situations. When strong winds or hail are involved, stay away from windows, as broken glass can cause sig-

nificant injuries. The most effective protection from lightning is inside a building or vehicle. If caught outside, squat down on your feet, to make yourself as small as possible. You don't want to be the tallest object in the area, but on the other hand, don't take shelter under a tall tree; if it is struck, you may be as well. Flooding takes many unsuspecting drivers for a wild ride every year. Never drive through flooded areas, especially fast moving water, as your vehicle could be swept away. A flooded road may also hide the fact that it's structurally unsafe, or washed out entirely.

The most spectacular phenomenon spawned by thunderstorms is the tornado. North Dakota averages 18 reported tornadoes per year, but that number has ranged from as little as two to as many as 56 in 1976. If faced with a tornado, take shelter in a small interior room on the lowest level of a sturdy building. Abandon mobile homes and automobiles for more substantial shelter as they provide very little, if any protection. If you are caught outside, lie down in a ditch or depression and cover your head.

Being aware of potential hazardous weather conditions and taking appropriate action will help keep you safe from the storm. Have a safe and enjoyable summer!

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