



Severe Weather Preparedness

With our unseasonably warm winter, tornadoes hit the Midwest on February 29, including the town of Newburgh, located in the Vincennes District. Tragically, on March 2, tornadoes came through Indiana again, ravaging the towns of Henryville, Marysville, Pekin and New Pekin and other areas in INDOT's Seymour and Vincennes districts. Nearby states were impacted as well.

Gov. Daniels declared disaster emergencies in the following 11 counties on March 3: Clark, Gibson, Harrison, Jefferson, Posey, Ripley, Scott, Shelby, Vanderburgh, Warrick and Washington counties. INDOT has been assisting local municipalities with cleaning debris off roadways and traffic control.

The arrival of spring signals an increase in thunderstorms with lightning, flood, wind and tornado threats. For Indiana, the National Weather Service (NWS) recognized Severe Weather Preparedness Week, March 18-24, to remind us to be safe during these events, whether we are on the road, at home or at work.

Tornadoes are more likely when the weather is warm and humid, and skies appear threatening. However, they can occur anytime in any geographic location.

Contrary to popular belief, taking shelter under a highway overpass is not a safe action. "If you're on the highway, the best bet is to get off the road and into a sturdy building," says Indianapolis' NWS Warning Coordination Meteorologist David Tucek. "Never try to outrun a tornado in your vehicle. If it's not possible to get off the road, you can stay in your vehicle but it's important to get below the window level. Another option is abandoning your vehicle if there is a low-lying area, lower than the roadway. In either option, protect your head with your hands, or with something like a coat or blanket."

According to the NWS, almost all lightning deaths occur outdoors. A common myth is that a vehicle's rubber tires protect drivers from lightning. As long as vehicle occupants don't touch the metal, the car's steel frame adds protection. In most cases, people are safer while in a vehicle than outdoors during lightning strikes.

Most INDOT crews are very familiar with flooding, because overflow from rivers and creeks often close highways and local streets. When approaching a flooded roadway, it's always best to remember the NWS phrase, "Turn Around Don't Drown™."

"INDOT has a great deal of experience with flooding, especially in recent years," said Deputy Commissioner of Operations Troy Woodruff. "When rainfall is significant, our crews are on standby with signs and barricades. These employees know which routes are low-lying and likely to flood quickly, so those areas are checked first. Law enforcement and locals are great partners in assisting with flooding information as well as closing, then re-opening, these flooded routes."



Flooding facts provided by the NWS:

- Hydroplaning can occur with just a little water on the roadways
- Most flash flooding deaths are vehicle related
- Six inches of standing water is enough to cause passenger cars to stall and a foot of water will float many vehicles
- Driving into floodwaters is one of the most dangerous actions that motorists can take
- Never drive through flooded roadways, especially if the water is moving rapidly, and never drive around barriers placed to block flooded roads. Remember, "Turn Around Don't Drown™."

INDOT crews assisting with storm cleanup need to be careful. Hazards associated with debris cleanup include utilizing a chainsaw, handling debris, operating a chipper spreader and dealing with improper traffic controls. Visit the INDOT [Safety Web](#) on the intranet for more information or ask your supervisor if you have any questions or concerns regarding safe operations during debris cleanup.