



TDCJ Risk Management's *Training Circular*

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UNPREDICTABLE WEATHER



Have you ever made spring-time plans based on the weather forecaster's predictions only to have them ruined — or at least saturated? Even with the advent of modern technology, long range forecasting is, at best, still just an educated guess. National and local weather services have state-of-the-art technology and computers that can pinpoint where and when severe weather is happening or is about to happen but long range forecasting is much more difficult. It's similar to high school algebra—too many equations with too many variables!

Spring weather in Texas is just like that final exam in algebra. Full of variables! During the transitional period of winter to spring, warm moist air pumps in from the Gulf of Mexico while the last few cold fronts of the season straggle across the Panhandle. The potential for severe

weather exists wherever these two weather patterns meet. The atmosphere between the two becomes extremely unstable making weather predictability increasingly difficult. Because of this volatility, the weather can change drastically over the course of a few hours, or even minutes.

What's the worst that could happen?

Most everyone either drives or carools to and from work. For this commute, very few people give much thought to what items they would need to survive a few hours or days away from home. After all, it's just a short drive to work and back home. You have a cell phone and a credit card if something happens, right? If you did need something, chances are there's a department superstore nearby.

Well, what if none of these options were available? Does this sound extreme or borderline paranoid? Maybe, but it

probably doesn't sound too exaggerated if you happen to be one of the staff members who were at work at the Gist, Leblanc or Stiles Units when Hurricane Rita took a tour of East Texas. TDCJ staff in the Beaumont area literally had to set up camp at their Units where they lived for several days during and after the storm. The cell phone radio towers were either damaged or blown down. Communication in and out of the area was almost non-existent. The Beaumont area was littered with debris, downed power and phone lines and was inundated with floodwaters. This is probably the worst case scenario come true, but the fact remains that it actually happened!

Be Prepared!

One of the best things that you can do is stay prepared for adverse weather conditions! Pack and keep a small 'survival kit' in your vehi-

cle — things that you would need daily for a short stay away from home. Items to consider might include:

- * A blanket and/or jacket
- * A change of clothes/underclothes (*remember what your mother said about always having clean underwear!*)
- * A flashlight w/spare batteries (*periodically check the condition of the batteries— a good time to do this is during the same time you're checking the air pressure in your spare tire!*)
- * Emergency flares
- * Jumper cables
- * First aid kit
- * Extra prescription medication — **Check with your supervisor to learn where you should keep this medication, especially if you work around offenders.*
- * Keep your vehicle fueled to at least 3/4's full.
- * Keep a list of emergency contact phone numbers — just in case your cell phone goes dead and won't recharge
- * A few non-perishable snack foods
- * Bottled water

Deadly Weather:

Spring also presents the most

likely time of the year for the occurrence of flash flooding. "The weather presents a very real danger in every season, but especially during this time of year conditions are ripe for powerful, damaging storms," said Larry Rockwell with American Red Cross Disaster Response.

Red Cross disaster officials recommend taking the following precautions to prepare for hazardous spring flooding:

Know What to Expect

- Know your area's flood risk--if unsure, call your local Red Cross chapter, emergency management office, or planning and zoning department.
- If it has been raining hard for several hours, or steadily raining for several days, be alert to the possibility of a flood.
- Listen to local radio or TV stations for flood information.

Reduce Potential Flood Damage By--

- Raising your furnace, water heater, and electric panel if they are in areas of your home that may be flooded.
- Consult with a professional for further information if this and other

damage reduction measures can be taken.

Floods Can Take Several Hours to Days to Develop

- A flood WATCH means a flood is possible in your area.
- A flood WARNING means flooding is already occurring or will occur soon in your area.



Flash Floods Can Take Only a Few Minutes to a Few Hours to Develop

- A flash flood WATCH means flash flooding is possible in your area.
- A flash flood WARNING means a flash flood is occurring or will occur *very* soon.

Prepare a Family Disaster Plan

- Check to see if you have insurance that covers flooding. If not, find out how to get flood insurance.
- Keep insurance policies, documents, and other valuables in a safe-deposit box.

When a Flood WATCH Is Issued . . .

- Move your furniture and valuables to higher floors of your home.
- Fill your car's gas tank, in case an evacuation notice is issued.

When a Flood WARNING Is Issued . . .

- Listen to local radio and TV stations for information and advice. If told to evacuate, do so as soon as possible.

When a Flash Flood WATCH Is Issued . . .

- Be alert to signs of flash flooding and be ready to evacuate on a moment's notice.

When a Flash Flood WARNING Is Issued . . .

- Or if you think it has already started, evacuate immediately. You may have only seconds to escape. Act quickly!
- Move to higher ground away from rivers, streams, creeks, and storm drains. Do not drive around barricades . . . they are there for your safety.
- If your car stalls in rapidly rising waters, abandon it immediately and climb to higher ground.

Texas' Tornado Alley

Tornadoes can produce winds greater than 300 mph, and can travel across the ground at up to 60 mph. They can develop any time of day, any month of the year, but are most common in the afternoon and evening, and in the spring and fall. Tornadoes are most common across the Great Plains and Gulf States regions of the US. More tornadoes occur in the United States than any other country in the world, and more tornadoes occur in Texas than any other state. Below-ground shelters, and reinforced "safe rooms" provide the best protection against tornadoic winds.

Other options include:

In homes or small buildings, go to the north-east corner of a basement. If a basement is not available, **go to the smallest, most-interior room on the lowest floor**, such as a closet or bathroom. Cover yourself to protect your body from flying debris.

In schools, hospitals, factories or shopping centers, **go to the smallest, most-interior rooms and hallways on the lowest floor**. Stay away from glass enclosed places or areas with wide-span roofs such as auditoriums and warehouses. Crouch down and cover your head.

In high rise buildings, **go to the smallest, most-interior rooms or hallways**. Stay away from exterior walls and windows.

In cars or mobile homes, abandon them immediately!! Cars and mobile homes provide no protection from tornadoic winds. If you are in either of those locations, leave them and go to a substantial structure or designated tornado shelter. **Do not attempt to seek shelter beneath an overpass or bridge**. They provide little or no shelter and have proved to be deadly options.

If caught in the open, lie flat in a culvert, ditch or depression and cover your head.

Tornadoes and hurricanes are not the only wind threats to Texas. Straight line winds are especially dangerous. These winds are usually most prevalent in the Texas Plains region. The agency incurs substantial damage annually to its facilities due to straight line winds. The dangers of these high winds are very similar to that of tornadoes and the same protective measures as those for tornadoes should be taken.

Lightning

Lightning is a threat anywhere thunderstorms occur. If you hear thunder, it is time to take shelter.

When inside:

- Avoid using the telephone, or other electrical appliances.
- Do not take a bath or shower, or stand near plumbing.

If caught outdoors:

- Seek shelter in a sturdy building. A hard-top automobile can also offer protection.
- If you are boating or swimming, get out of the water and move to a safe shelter on land.
- If you are in a wooded area, seek shelter under a thick growth of relatively small trees.
- If you feel your hair standing on end, squat with your head between your knees. Do not lie flat!
- Avoid isolated trees or other tall objects, water, fences, convertible cars, tractors and motorcycles.

Spring Fever

No, it's not another severe weather condition nor a side effect of one. It's something to be welcomed. As the mercury raises this spring, Risk Management encourages TDCJ staff to spend some time outdoors. Studies have proven that outdoor activity promotes a sense of well being and most everyone can benefit from a little outdoor physical activity. But remember, whether you're playing a pickup game of basketball, working in the yard, or spending a day on the lake — keep an eye to the sky and stay prepared for adverse weather!

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