

Severe Weather: Know When and Where to Shelter

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | Reviewed October 6, 2026 | Discussion + field checks

Why this matters

A shelter plan is useful only if we can reach the right shelter before conditions become dangerous. Lightning, tornadoes and flooding need different decisions. Decide who watches conditions and calls the stop before the weather changes.

Objective: Identify today's weather triggers, suitable shelter and conditions for an authorized restart.

Key hazards or failure points

Late warnings; unreachable or unsuitable shelter; exposed travel; unsecured materials; flooding; wind beyond equipment limits; restarting before the area is checked.

Practical controls

- Review the local forecast and alerts. Name the weather monitor and backup, communication method and stop authority. Plan enough time to stop safely and reach shelter before the threat arrives.
- For thunder, move immediately to a substantial building or enclosed metal-topped vehicle with windows closed. Open shelters and trees are unsuitable. A vehicle used for lightning shelter is not a planned tornado shelter.
- Identify the site's tornado shelter and flood-avoidance routes separately. Do not walk or drive into floodwater. Use actual equipment and site wind/weather limits. Secure materials in advance while conditions are safe.

Verify It in the Field

Before work, the leader confirms the alert source works at this location and the assigned monitor can reach the crew. Walk the safe route to the selected shelter; check access, availability and room for everyone.

Ask workers which shelter applies to each expected hazard. Check that equipment limits and shutdown instructions are available and that the plan allows travel time. Do not send someone into an approaching storm to secure materials.

Record the forecast/alert review, shelter, route, contact and stop/restart criteria. Use the separate field sheet to capture actual checks rather than writing only "weather monitored."

Stop and reassess

Stop for thunder, threatening conditions, applicable warnings, breached equipment/site limits or failed shelter access. Shelter and account for the crew. NWS advises waiting at least 30 minutes after the last thunder before leaving lightning shelter. Restart also requires applicable warnings to be resolved, post-storm hazards checked and the designated authority's clearance.

Ask the crew

1. Which weather change could affect this task before we finish?
2. Show the shelter and how we will receive the stop message.
3. What must be checked before we leave shelter and restart work?

Before exposure: know the trigger, allow travel time and verify the shelter.

Sources: NWS lightning, tornado and flood guidance; OSHA/NOAA FS-3863; site/equipment limits.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance, references, supervisor check and attendance record accompany this talk.