

Watch vs. Warning

Two of the most commonly confused terms in weather are watches and warnings and they have two very different meanings and it's very important to understand the difference.

When you hear the term "**watch**" -- tornado or thunderstorm -- it means that conditions are right for a twister or a severe thunderstorm to form. It's a good idea to have a TV or radio nearby for frequent updates.

But when a warning is issued, that's a much different story. For severe thunderstorms, a "**warning**" means that one has been spotted and is moving into or is currently in a specific county or counties. In the case of a tornado warning, it means that a funnel cloud has actually been spotted or indicated by radar.

If given for your area or county, it means you should take immediate cover.

Knowing basic terminology is the first step in staying safe in a thunderstorm:

- A **SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WATCH** is issued by the Storm Prediction Center and means conditions are favorable for the development of thunderstorms that will exceed severe limits.
- A **SEVERE THUNDERSTORM WARNING** is issued by the local office of the National Weather Service. They use radar, satellite, lightning detectors, and spotters to follow thunderstorms and issue warnings for counties when severe weather is imminent.

Here are some safety tips for when a thunderstorm is approaching:

- If you can hear thunder, you are close enough to the storm to be struck by lightning. Seek safe shelter immediately.
- DO NOT seek shelter in small sheds, under isolated trees, or in convertible automobiles. Move to a sturdy building or car.
- If lightning is occurring and a sturdy shelter is not available, seek shelter inside a hard top car and keep windows up.
- Stay away from water, this includes boats.
- Telephone lines and metal pipes can conduct electricity. Avoid using the telephone or any electrical appliances. Use phones ONLY in an emergency.
- Do not take a bath or shower. Turn off air conditioners. Power surges from lightning can overload compressors.
- If you are boating or swimming, get to land and find shelter immediately