TORNADO SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

Designate in the school safety plan which faculty will monitor NOAA Weather Radio during Watches and other severe weather. Include provisions for all after-hours, school related activities. Provide a backup source of information, such as TV, radio, or internet.

Identify in the plan the personnel and method to disseminate all severe weather information to every class and activity. Have an alternate method to notify students and faculty in case of power failure.

Remember, the NWS issues a Tornado Watch when conditions are favorable for tornado development
and a Tornado Warning when a tornado has been indicated by Doppler radar or has been spotted.

Schools, including outdoor and portable classrooms, should be inspected and best available protective areas designated. Interior locations on the ground floor, away from windows are the best.

Inspect the most interior areas on the ground floor in the school to select and designate the best available protective areas. Portable classrooms, large, open rooms such as lunchrooms, gymnasiums, and auditoriums or rooms with exterior walls should never be used.

Notify students and faculty in portable classrooms, or outside the school building of impending weather first so they can take cover before severe weather arrives.

Provide that faculty or students with disabilities take cover early, before arrival of impending severe weather.

Train students so they can instantly get into a protective position when instructed. Students should face an interior wall, with knees and elbows on the ground, and hands over the back of their head. Illustrations of this position should be available to the students prior to a severe weather event. See illustration to the right.

Establish guidelines for the use of school buses during Watches and Warnings. All school buses should be equipped with radios for communicating important weather information. Delaying bus departures and diverting buses on routes are strategies for protecting drivers and riders.

School bus drivers should identify protective areas along each part of their route where they and their charges can take cover if overtaken by a tornado or high winds. Do not hesitate to take cover in ditches or other below ground level places. Do not stay in the school bus if caught in a tornado or high winds. Do not attempt to outrun severe weather.

Ensure faculty and staff in charge of outdoor and after school activities have access to a weather radio at all times. Ensure they are knowledgeable of the school safety plan and where nearest protective areas are located.

Prioritize areas within the school building, by number of barrier walls, construction material, etc., as possible protective areas. Create a movement plan to fill the highest rated areas first.

Look for hazards inherent to the building, such as heating system pipes carrying scalding water, hazardous materials, high chimneys, etc., which would make an otherwise acceptable protective area, unsafe. Do not use such areas.

National Weather Service officials will brief EMA officials in advance of anticipated severe weather so that school officials can make decisions regarding school closures for High Risk days.

Include tornado shelters when planning additions or new school buildings