

TORNADO RECOVERY

What to Do After a Tornado Destroys Your Home or Community

When a tornado destroys your home - or causes widespread damage throughout your city - it can be difficult to know what to do first. You may be worried about loved ones, pets, shelter, medications, insurance, damaged belongings and whether anything can be saved.

Recovery will take time. Begin with personal safety, follow the instructions of local emergency officials, and handle one decision at a time.

EMERGENCY

Call 911 for life-threatening emergencies. RestorU does not replace police, fire, medical, utility, or emergency-management services.

Local notice: Please respect the Menasha Police Department's request that outsiders stay clear of damaged areas so emergency services and restoration companies can help those affected.

Several drop-off locations have been established. See [Donation & Supply Information](#) for current details.

RESTORATION

CLEAN-UP

REBUILDING

CONTRACTOR SERVICES

RestorU provides emergency property stabilization, damage mitigation, content cleaning and storage, and complete reconstruction services.

1 Make Sure Everyone Is Safe

Account for family members, neighbors, and pets as soon as conditions permit. Provide basic first aid only when it is safe to do so, and contact emergency services for anyone who is injured, trapped or missing. Continue listening to local alerts. A tornado may be followed by additional severe weather, flooding, damaged utility systems and other hazards. Do not return to an evacuated neighborhood until local authorities say it is safe. Access to heavily damaged areas may be restricted, so bring photo identification and proof of your address when returning. Avoid unnecessary driving. Roads may be blocked by debris, emergency vehicles, damaged bridges, fallen trees or downed power lines.

2 Do Not Enter a Severely Damaged Home

Even when part of a building appears intact, its roof, walls, floors, foundation or utility systems may be unstable. Stay outside when you see:

- ✗ Collapsed or leaning walls
- ✗ A sagging roof or ceiling
- ✗ Shifting, cracking or unusual noises
- ✗ Broken gas lines or the smell of gas
- ✗ Standing water near electrical equipment
- ✗ Exposed wiring or downed power lines
- ✗ Chemical spills or damaged fuel containers
- ✗ Broken glass, nails, sharp metal or unstable debris

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Do not touch a fallen power line or anything that may be in contact with it. Report power lines, gas odors and utility damage to the appropriate utility company or emergency authority. Ready.gov advises watching for fallen power lines and trees and reporting them immediately. Wait for emergency officials, building inspectors or qualified professionals to determine whether the property can be entered safely.

3 Wear Protective Clothing Around Debris

Tornado debris can contain nails, splintered lumber, broken glass, insulation, sharp metal, chemicals and contaminated water. Anyone entering a cleared damage area should wear:

- ✓ Sturdy, closed-toe work boots
- ✓ Heavy work gloves
- ✓ Long pants and long sleeves
- ✓ Eye protection
- ✓ A properly selected mask or respirator when dust, insulation or contamination is present
- ✓ A hard hat when overhead hazards exist

Tornado cleanup can expose workers and volunteers to electrical hazards, falls, hazardous materials, carbon monoxide, heat stress and injuries involving vehicles or heavy equipment. Children and pets should be kept away from damaged structures and debris fields.

4 Use Generators Safely

Power outages frequently follow major tornadoes, but portable generators can cause deadly carbon-monoxide poisoning. Never operate a generator:

- ! Inside a house
- ! Inside a basement
- ! Inside a garage or carport
- ! Near an open door, window or vent

The CDC recommends placing a portable generator outside and at least 20 feet from the home, with its exhaust directed away from the building. Carbon monoxide cannot be seen or smelled and can kill without warning. Do not use charcoal grills, camp stoves or other fuel-burning equipment inside an enclosed living space.

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5 Contact Your Insurance Company

Notify your homeowners or commercial-property insurance carrier as soon as reasonably possible. Ask for a claim number and the name and contact information of the adjuster assigned to the loss. Questions to ask include:

- ☐ What damage is covered?

- ☐ Is emergency board-up or roof tarping covered?

- ☐ What documentation does the insurer require?

- ☐ May damaged contents be moved?

- ☐ Does the policy provide temporary housing or additional living expenses?

- ☐ Are emergency mitigation services covered?

- ☐ When will an adjuster inspect the property?

- ☐ What must be approved before permanent repairs begin?

Write down the date, time and substance of every insurance conversation. Save emails, estimates, reports and claim documents in one secure location.

6 Photograph and Record the Damage

When authorities have cleared the property for entry, document conditions before removing debris or beginning major cleanup. Take wide and close-up photographs or videos of:

- ☐ Every side of the building
- ☐ The roof, windows and exterior openings
- ☐ Each damaged room
- ☐ Structural damage
- ☐ Water intrusion
- ☐ Damaged appliances and electronics
- ☐ Furniture, clothing and household contents
- ☐ Garages, sheds, vehicles and landscaping
- ☐ Debris that identifies the type and extent of damage

Create a written inventory of damaged or missing possessions. Include descriptions, approximate ages, purchase prices and replacement costs when known. FEMA recommends keeping receipts for property replacement and repairs. It also advises retaining samples of damaged materials—such as carpeting, upholstery, or window coverings—when safe and practical because the type and quality may affect the insurance claim. Consult the insurer before signing major cleaning, remediation, or repair agreements. Back up photographs and documents to secure cloud storage or send copies to a trusted family member.

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7 Prevent Additional Property Damage

Insurance policies commonly require owners to take reasonable steps to prevent avoidable additional damage, but no property is worth risking an injury. Emergency stabilization may include:

- ✓ Boarding broken doors and windows
- ✓ Temporarily covering roof openings
- ✓ Protecting exposed portions of the building
- ✓ Removing standing water
- ✓ Beginning structural drying
- ✓ Separating wet contents from dry contents
- ✓ Moving salvageable belongings to secure storage
- ✓ Installing temporary fencing or other access controls

Do not climb onto an unstable roof or attempt structural work yourself. Use trained, insured professionals with the proper equipment. RestorU can help evaluate immediate property needs and coordinate emergency mitigation, content handling and the next phases of recovery.

8 Protect Belongings That May Be Salvageable

A home may appear completely destroyed while some belongings can still be recovered. Depending on the type and extent of damage, professional content services may help with:

- ✓ Inventorying affected belongings
- ✓ Photographing and documenting contents
- ✓ Packing and transporting salvageable items
- ✓ Cleaning and sanitizing recoverable contents
- ✓ Deodorizing smoke- or water-affected items
- ✓ Drying certain documents or household materials
- ✓ Secure off-site storage
- ✓ Returning belongings after repairs are completed

Do not throw everything away before the insurance company has had an opportunity to document the loss, unless an item presents an immediate health or safety hazard. Wet materials should be addressed as soon as the property can be entered safely. Delayed drying may allow additional deterioration and microbial growth.

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9 Find Temporary Shelter and Essential Services

When an entire neighborhood or city has been affected, local hotels and rental properties may fill quickly. Contact your insurance company about temporary living expenses and follow announcements from local emergency management. The American Red Cross may provide emergency shelter, meals, cleanup supplies, damage assessment assistance and emotional-support resources following major tornadoes. Bring essential items when relocating:

- ☐ Identification
- ☐ Insurance information
- ☐ Prescription medications
- ☐ Medical equipment
- ☐ Phone chargers
- ☐ Clothing and hygiene supplies
- ☐ Pet food and records
- ☐ Important financial and legal documents

Notify relatives where you are staying but avoid publicly posting that your damaged property is vacant.

10 Apply for Disaster Assistance When Available

After a federally declared disaster, FEMA assistance may be available for eligible households with disaster-related needs that are not fully covered by insurance. Assistance varies by declaration and individual circumstances. Keep copies of:

- ☐ Insurance claim information
- ☐ Denial or settlement letters
- ☐ Temporary housing expenses
- ☐ Repair estimates
- ☐ Cleanup invoices
- ☐ Medication and medical expenses
- ☐ Transportation costs
- ☐ Receipts for emergency purchases

Use only official government channels when applying. FEMA does not charge an application fee.

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11 Be Careful of Post-Storm Contractor Scams

After a large tornado, unfamiliar contractors may arrive from outside the community and pressure property owners to sign immediately. Remember: RestorU is your trusted local restoration company who has faithfully served you for 20+ years. Call them at 920-722-4357. Before hiring a company:

- ☐ Ask for identification and proof of insurance.
- ☐ Verify licensing or credentials required for the work.
- ☐ Obtain a written scope of work and estimate.
- ☐ Read the entire contract before signing.
- ☐ Understand payment terms.
- ☐ Avoid large, unexplained cash payments.
- ☐ Do not pay by gift card, cryptocurrency or wire transfer.
- ☐ Be cautious of promises that sound too good to be true.
- ☐ Confirm who will communicate with the insurance company.
- ☐ Keep copies of every document you sign.

FEMA recommends considering established local contractors known in the community and obtaining multiple written estimates when circumstances permit. The FTC also warns survivors about unlicensed contractors, high-pressure sales tactics and demands for unusual payment methods.

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12 Plan for Cleanup, Mitigation and Reconstruction

A major tornado loss often involves several distinct phases:

Emergency Response and Stabilization

The property is inspected for immediate concerns, openings are temporarily secured and measures are taken to prevent additional damage.

Damage Mitigation

Water, moisture, contamination and other damaging conditions are addressed. Unsafe materials may need to be isolated or removed.

Content Cleaning, Sanitization and Storage

Recoverable belongings are documented, packed, cleaned and stored while the building is repaired.

Demolition and Debris Removal

Materials that cannot be safely restored are removed in accordance with the approved scope of work and local requirements.

Complete Reconstruction

The structure is rebuilt, repaired or redesigned according to the approved plan, applicable codes and insurance authorization. Using one local restoration company to coordinate multiple phases may reduce communication problems and help maintain a clear record of the work performed.

Local Tornado Recovery Help from RestorU

RestorU has served the Fox Valley for more than 20 years. Our Neenah headquarters allows us to respond as a local restoration company—not as an unfamiliar company arriving from outside the area after a disaster.

Our services include:

- ✓ Emergency property response
- ✓ Board-up and temporary protection
- ✓ Water removal and structural drying
- ✓ Damage mitigation
- ✓ Content inventory and pack-out
- ✓ Content cleaning, sanitization, and storage
- ✓ Debris and reconstruction coordination
- ✓ Residential and commercial restoration
- ✓ Complete reconstruction

Contact RestorU

Phone: 920-722-4357

Email: hubbell@restorU.net

Website: RestorU.net

When your home, business or community has suffered catastrophic tornado damage, you do not have to figure out every step alone. RestorU can help assess the property, explain the restoration process and develop a plan for moving from emergency mitigation through reconstruction.

DONATION INFO

[Click here for current donation locations and requested supplies.](#)