



More than 200 mobile homes were damaged in the tornado that touched down at Chateau Estates Mobile Home Park, near 13 Mile and Decker in Novi, in summer 1987.

Action, safety plans needed for tornadoes

By Bob Sklar
staff writer

Respecting a tornado's fury could save your life.

"Most people never think it could happen to them. Then you look back to when a tornado struck in West Bloomfield and we had a mini natural disaster," said fire marshal Joe Schornack of the Farmington Department of Public Safety.

"So it's a good idea to be properly prepared in case something does happen. It's a good idea to know what to do."

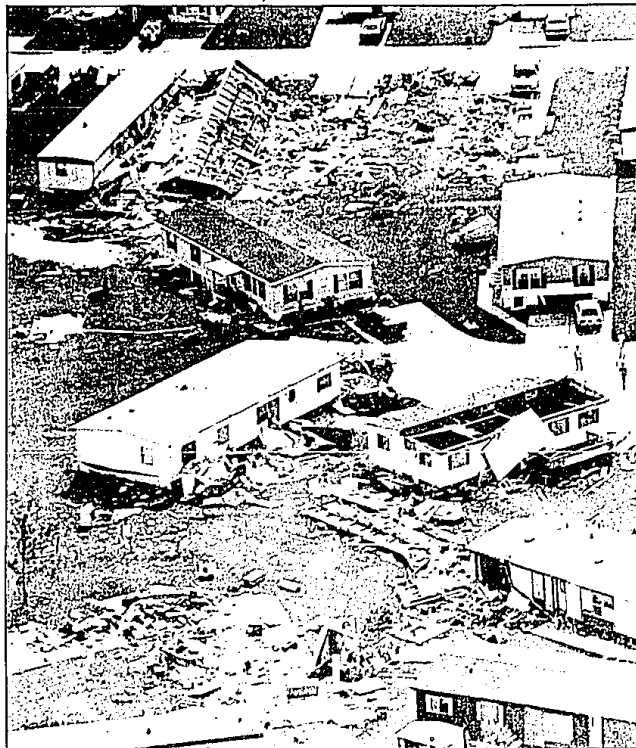
Gov. James Blanchard and Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy have designated Michigan Tornado Safety Week for March 19-26 to help stimulate public awareness and interest in tornado safety.

Michigan averages 16 tornadoes a year, the fourth highest average in the nation. The majority of the 597 tornadoes in the state since 1950 struck in southern Michigan. More than 230 people have died.

A TORNADO that briefly swirled through a northern Farmington Hills subdivision touched down near Orchard Lake Road and Maple in West Bloomfield the evening of March 21, 1976. A 15-year-old girl was killed, more than 50 were injured and property damage topped \$5 million.

The evening of Sept. 28, 1986, the tail of a tornado lifted a house under construction in Bridle Hills subdivision in eastern Farmington Hills from its foundation, moved it forward, then dropped it, leaving the shingled roof nearly intact. The house, valued at \$152,000, had to be demolished. The twister also damaged two nearby houses in the subdivision, near 10 Mile and Inkster.

The afternoon of June 21, 1987, a tornado swooped down from a crackling thunderstorm in the late afternoon and killed a 24-year-old man in Chateau Estates mobile home park at 13 Mile near Decker in Novi. His 27-year-old wife and 19-month-old son were badly injured. At least six other injuries were reported. Dam-



A late-afternoon twister wreaked havoc at Chateau Estates Mobile Home Park, near 13 Mile and Decker in Novi, in summer 1987.

age to more than 200 mobile homes topped \$2 million.

THE OAKLAND County Division of EMS & Emergency Management will test the county's 50-siren tornado warning system at 1 p.m. Thursday, March 23. Farmington Hills has 10 warning sirens, including one at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus. Farmington has two warning sirens.

The siren sounding, a steady three-minute tone, will be just a test. There is no "all clear" siren.

Whether during the test or in threatening weather, when the siren sounds, don't call your police or fire department unless you have an emergency to report, Farmington

Hills police Lt. Richard Murphy said.

In threatening weather, take basic precautions, like making sure the stove is off and taking cover quickly. Turn on a battery-powered radio or a portable TV for information. Waiting in the living room for a TV report could prove dangerous.

A siren sounding doesn't necessarily mean a tornado has been spotted locally.

All sirens in Oakland County are activated by either the National Weather Service or Oakland County. And all go off, rather than just those in a specific area of the county.

"But we have a tone alert receiver that's activated by the county and tells us where the tornado is sighted

within 3-4 minutes," Farmington Hills police Capt. Russ Conway said. "It used to take 20-30 minutes from a teletype to come out."

IN FARMINGTON Public Schools, three tornado drills are required each school year — in September, January and March.

Both the special services supervisor and the superintendent have a weather alert monitor in their offices in the Lewis Schulman Administrative Center.

The superintendent or a designate can authorize a telephone fanout to alert school buildings after a tornado warning. Students and teachers would go to designated shelters within each building.

Oakland offering Skywarn classes

Oakland County will offer free Skywarn tornado-sighting classes this month.

Skywarn is an effort to save lives during severe weather emergencies by expanding networks of spotters and encouraging wide participation in tornado preparedness programs.

There is no way to stop tornadoes, and not all tornadoes show up on radar. But they can be seen with certainty.

Spotter classes for police officers, firefighters, EMS workers, security personnel, volunteers and the public are scheduled for 2:30-4:30 p.m. Thursday, March 23 and April 4 at Oakland County EMS & Emergency Management, on the lower level of the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac.

Call 858-5300 to register for one of the sessions.

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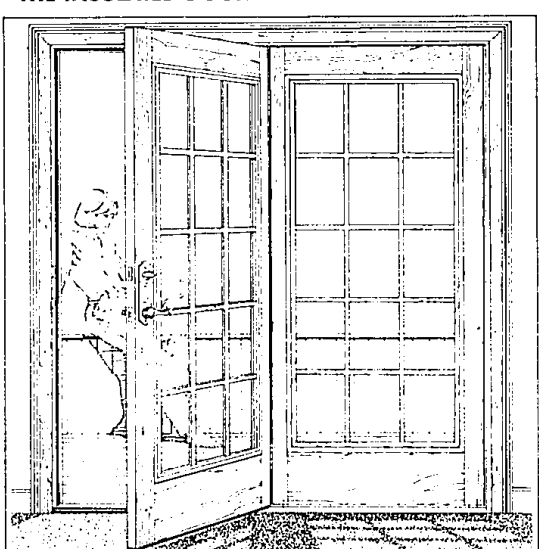
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