

Twister tipsters

Avoid disaster — heed storm hints

By JOE MARTUCCI

Memories of last year's tornado disaster in West Bloomfield were rekindled Saturday, as twisters struck several sections of the state.

Some safety tips compiled by the Oakland County Disaster Control and Civil Defense office may prove useful again, perhaps in the near future. It's important to know the difference between a tornado watch and a tornado warning.

A tornado watch is issued by the U.S. Weather Bureau when conditions are such that a tornado may develop within a defined area. A tornadowarning is issued when tornadoes are actually sighted. Whenever possible, the path of the tornado will be given.

On Saturday, for example, it was reported that a tornado had been sighted near Howell and was heading toward Oakland County at 65 miles per hour.

Peak tornado months in Michigan are April, May and June. Twisters can occur, however, from March

through September and are not infrequently during any month. Tornadoes are difficult to predict because forces that cause them are complex. Michigan has an average of four tornadoes per year, with most of them developing in the hours following the warmest part of the day.

IF A TORNADO warning is issued, immediate shelter should be sought by persons in the danger area. There is no sure protection against a tornado except underground.

In homes, take shelter in the northeast corner of the basement, or under sturdy items in the basement, such as a heavy laundry tub, pool table, work bench or under the staircase.

If time allows, open windows on at least two sides of the house, preferably on the east and west sides. This will equalize air pressure, which can build inside the house, blowing out walls.

If there is no basement, take cover under heavily stuffed furniture in the center of the house or in a bathroom

or interior closet. Bathrooms with outside walls on the south or west side of the house should be avoided, however. Turn off gas and electric appliances, except radio or television, but do not shut off gas pilot lights. Do not turn off gas or electricity at the meter or main switch. If the home is hit, turn off the main gas valve.

Take a first aid kit and portable, battery-operated radio down the basement with you. Do not light candles, as this could cause an explosion if a gas line ruptures.

PRECAUTIONS to take if not at home follow:

- In a car—Abandon the vehicle and head for shelter under a bridge or in a ditch or ravine if there is no building nearby. Lie flat on the ground, upwind of the parked car. If an overpass or concrete viaduct is nearby, take shelter so that concrete pilings are between you and the approaching tornado.
- In abus or truck—Try to move away from the storm by driving at

right angles to its path. If this is not possible, park the vehicle pointing into the wind, pull the handbrake, unload passengers, open as many windows as possible on both sides and seek shelter.

• In apartment or office buildings—Take shelter in lower floors, in the basement, or in rest rooms, closets, utility rooms, closets or interior corridors.

• In shopping centers—If there is no basement or below ground level, take shelter in interior hallways or small roomer shops on the east or north side of the building. Avoid skylights, glass signs or display cases which might shatter.

• In mobile homes—Leave and take shelter in interior hallways of the community building or in a ditch or ravine on the west or south side of the trailer park. Protect your head from flying debris.

• In schools—Students should follow instructions of teachers and other authorities.

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State agencies provide senior citizen hotline

Toll free hotlines have been established by many state agencies and departments in an effort to make government more accessible to all its residents, but senior citizens may benefit especially, according to state authorities.

The hot line numbers are toll free 800 numbers and are used by the following agencies:

- Public Service Commission 292-5555 for problems concerning information on utilities
- Travel Bureau 292-2521 for information on road conditions, upcoming

events, campsites and weather forecasts.

• Natural Resources 292-7800 to report poaching and other violations of conservation laws.

• Automotive Regulations 292-4204 deals with complaints against auto dealers, mechanics and repair shops.

• Medicaid Information 292-2550 answers questions on the medicare system.

• Michigan Insurance Bureau, Consumer Assistance 292-5943, more

Other offices of state government can be reached by calling 317-373-1837.

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