

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATEWIDE TORNADO DRILL SET FOR MARCH 15

SUFFOLK, Virginia (March 14, 2011) - As a result of the devastating Class III tornado that struck Suffolk on April 28, 2008, our citizens know firsthand the unbelievable destruction these windstorms can bring. On that day three years ago, random paths of ruin stretched over 25 miles, as row upon row of homes were reduced to heaps of splintered lumber, shopping centers were stripped of walls and ceilings revealing bare metal structures, and parking lots turned into junk yards as cars were tossed like toys by 135 mile per hour winds – some even jutting out of buildings. So severe was our devastation that newscasts were seen all over the world. Miraculously, no lives were lost, but damages totaled over \$28 million.

Even though tornadoes in Virginia have hit in every month of the year, the spring season is particularly unpredictable. Everyone needs to know what to do if a tornado warning is issued for their area.

We can join our fellow Virginians by participating in the annual Statewide Tornado Drill, set for **Tuesday, March 15, at 9:45 a.m.** Every home, business, school, organization, government office and organization can hold a tornado drill. If you can't participate at that time, then choose another time or date that works better for you – the most important thing is to have a drill so that you can practice tornado safety.

To start the drill, the National Weather Service will send a test tornado warning at 9:45 a.m. March 15 that will trigger a tone alert and message on NOAA Weather Radio, simulating what listeners will hear during an actual tornado warning. This will prompt radio and television stations to broadcast a test message. During the drill, you should go immediately to the lowest level of your home, office or school building and move to a windowless interior hallway, room or closet. Then take a “drop, cover and hold” position. This means crouch as low as possible to the floor, facing down and covering your head with your hands.

If an actual tornado were heading your way, a NOAA Weather Radio with SAME alerts is the fastest way to get warnings. SAME stands for Specific Area Message Encoding, a feature that allows you to program your radio to hear alerts for your area. NOAA Weather Radios are available at electronics and sporting goods stores, discount and department stores, and online. Some have strobe lights for those who are hearing impaired. They come in battery-powered models, and many also have AM/FM bands, making them an excellent addition to your home and office emergency supplies.

The Statewide Tornado Drill is a joint effort of the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and the National Weather Service. To learn more about conducting a tornado drill, and to register your participation in the statewide drill, go to www.vaemergency.com.

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