

# IN THE KNOW

## Wintertime tornadoes are unusual, not unheard of

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Nobody wants to think about a tornado hitting their home or business, but in Tornado Alley it's a very real threat. When you do think about tornadoes, it's likely in the spring and early summer when they're most common. However, wintertime doesn't mean the danger has passed, which was unfortunately demonstrated last Friday when 40-plus tornadoes ripped through six states causing mass destruction and numerous deaths. The best advice is to be prepared no matter the season.

"Strong and violent tornadoes are obviously very rare during the winter months but not completely unheard of," said Val Castor, the senior StormTracker for KOTV in Tulsa. "It has happened before, especially in the southeast. A tornado outbreak of this magnitude though, thankfully is rare for any time of year."

Castor is referring to the tornado outbreak on Dec. 10 and into Dec. 11.

He joined News 9 in Oklahoma City in the spring of 1991 as their first StormTracker and has been with the station for 30 years. He and his wife Amy chase storms together and have seen some of the most extreme weather imaginable.

Traditionally, the area known as Tornado Alley in the Great Plains is where most tornadoes occur. Although the exact location of Tornado Alley differs between sources, it always includes a large portion of Oklahoma. Recently, several sources have made references to research that indicates Tornado Alley is shifting eastward. Castor doesn't agree.

"I have heard talk that Tornado Alley is shifting eastward but don't agree," he said. "Our weather is cyclical in nature. Some years the highest tornado frequency is in the east, some years west, and some years north. It all depends on the overall large-scale patterns. However, in the long term, I still think Tornado Alley will remain in the plains."

Residents of tornado-prone regions like Oklahoma need to be vigilant. Whether it's an unusual wintertime tornado or a more



common springtime tornado, you must be prepared before a tornado strikes. Make sure you understand the tornado warning system and that you've identified the safest

places to take shelter.

The City of Miami operates and maintains 19 sirens as part of its Outdoor Warning System. These sirens are tested

monthly throughout the spring and into late fall, weather permitting. A tornado watch means a tornado is possible, while a tornado warning means one has been spotted. This is when the sirens will sound and you should seek shelter immediately.

The city doesn't maintain public storm shelters. The Civic Center doesn't meet appropriate construction specifications, meaning it may not withstand a tornado. Also, Miami's flooding concerns make it nearly impossible to find a safe place to put public shelters.

Driving to a public shelter can also expose you to greater risk. However, if you live in a mobile home, it's generally not safe to remain in these during a tornado. Identify the closest sturdy building to seek shelter.

For other types of homes, take shelter away from windows in a basement, if you have one. If you don't, go to an interior room on the ground floor, such as a closet or a similarly small space without windows. For those who're frequently at work or school, make sure you know the safe places to seek shelter in these buildings. If you're caught in a building with long spans of space, a restroom is often the safest place to take shelter.

In Oklahoma, one of the safest places to wait out a tornado is in a safe room or underground tornado shelter built or installed on-site at your home or business. Run practice drills to ensure everyone in your household or business knows the quickest, safest route to get to this shelter.

Once a tornado and severe weather have passed, don't forget that flooding may have occurred, especially in flood-prone areas of Miami. Never attempt to drive through high water, especially swiftly moving water. Also, be on the lookout for downed power lines, which pose an additional risk.

For more information on tornado safety, visit the Red Cross webpage at [www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/tornado.html](http://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/tornado.html) or the National Safety Council webpage at [www.nsc.org/community-safety/safety-topics/emergency-preparedness/tornado-preparedness](http://www.nsc.org/community-safety/safety-topics/emergency-preparedness/tornado-preparedness).

## MPL offers free high school completion program

Residents of Miami and surrounding communities who are 25-years-old and older have another option available to complete their high school education thanks to a pilot project of the Oklahoma Department of Libraries (ODL) and the Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development (OOWD).

Miami Public Library and four other public libraries in the state are offering a limited number of scholarships for qualifying individuals to access Gale Excel High School, an online and fully-accredited High School Diploma program recognized by colleges, universities, and employers.

Funding for the pilot is courtesy of funds from the U.S. Department of Labor under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds through the Institute for Museum and Library Services.

"This is a great opportunity for individuals who have schedules that make it difficult to participate in other adult education programs," according to Marcia Johnson, director of the library.

"The high school completion program is self-paced, so students will find it easier to balance school with the demands of their daily life," Johnson said. "There's also a great variety of classes offered, and teachers and instructors are behind the scenes for students who have questions or need additional assistance."

ODL Director Melody Kellogg said the flexibility of the program—as well as its online access—is important, especially in the age of COVID.

"We wanted to use some of our ARPA funds to expand the educational offerings of our public libraries, and we knew that the pandemic had disrupted so many schedules across the board. Attending a crowded classroom in-person may not be an option for some people. Excel High School allows for social distancing while providing top-notch educational opportunities," Kellogg said.

Kellogg said online high school programs in

public libraries also have a proven track record in Oklahoma. The Pioneer Library System that serves Cleveland, McLain and Pottawatomie counties is currently offering the program.

Pioneer director Lisa Wells said the library system has celebrated eight graduations and that eleven students are presently enrolled.

"Many of our graduates have shared that they've been able to receive promotions, higher pay, and even apply for college," Wells said. "The feedback we receive from the students shows the transformative power of a high school diploma."

Wells said getting to graduation isn't easy for some students since they may be balancing full-time jobs and families. "But we've witnessed first-hand the positive impact achieving this goal has on the student, their families, and their earning potential."

Kellogg said improving success on the work front for students is a program goal for ODL.

"A high school education is essential for today's job seekers, and we knew we wanted to work with the Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development on this project," Kellogg said. "They came on board with major funding and we're so grateful."

"The Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development is thrilled to support the Department of Libraries and the pilot libraries," OOWD Deputy Director Susannah Gravley, said. "Expanding access to adult education, and increasing the number of Oklahomans with a high school diploma, is critical for the future of our workforce and will open doors for individuals across the state."

Wells said it's exciting to see Excel High School expanding to other public libraries in the state, and she encourages potential students in Miami to explore the option.

"The evaluations and testimonies of our graduates show the program can make such a difference," Wells said.

For more information on Excel High School, visit or call Miami Public Library at 918-541-2292.

## OTTAWA COUNTY COURT REPORTS

### Divorces

none

### Protective orders

Heather Cheyenne Smith vs. JD Monroe Smith

### Misdemeanors

State of Oklahoma v. Justin Michael Bennett for driving without a valid drivers license  
 State of Oklahoma v. Mason Black for driving without a valid drivers license  
 State of Oklahoma v. Thomas Merton Bringgood for malicious injury to property under \$1,000  
 State of Oklahoma v. Michael Roy Elsten Jr. for driving with license cancelled/suspended/revoked  
 State of Oklahoma v. Christopher Weldon Faries for driving with license cancelled/suspended/revoked  
 State of Oklahoma v. Hunter Lee Grant for failure to maintain insurance or security  
 State of Oklahoma v. Michael Steven Harris for driving with license cancelled/suspended/revoked  
 State of Oklahoma v. Joshua Michael Holland for false reporting of a crime  
 State of Oklahoma v. Jamie Lane for driving with license cancelled/suspended/revoked  
 State of Oklahoma v. McKenna Lord for public intoxication  
 State of Oklahoma v. Christopher M. Lowe for driving without a valid drivers license  
 State of Oklahoma v. Matthew Robert McCarter for driving with license cancelled/suspended/revoked  
 State of Oklahoma v. Preston Howard Parker for driving without a valid drivers license  
 State of Oklahoma v. Phillip John Shyers

Jr. for driving without a valid drivers license

State of Oklahoma v. Douglas Franklin Tarabek for domestic assault & battery in the presence of minor children  
 State of Oklahoma v. Luke Nagesh Thomas for DUI-alcohol and drugs  
 State of Oklahoma v. Zoey Alexa Lynn Youngblood for following too closely

### Felonies

State of Oklahoma v. Abraham Cazares for attempted grand larceny  
 State of Oklahoma v. Charles Craig Chance for escape from jail after former conviction of two or more felonies  
 State of Oklahoma v. Levi Duncan Ellis for burglary in the 2nd degree, AFCF  
 State of Oklahoma v. Jeremy Gervais for burglary in the second degree  
 State of Oklahoma v. Eric Nolan Gomey for DUI 2nd and sub AFCF  
 State of Oklahoma v. Brian Matthew Kerns for burglary in the third degree  
 State of Oklahoma v. Amanda Grace Marie Killian for possession of stolen vehicle  
 State of Oklahoma v. Daniel Wesley Lamia for possession of controlled drug (meth) with intent to distribute  
 State of Oklahoma v. Matthew Prater for domestic assault and battery by strangulation  
 State of Oklahoma v. Dewayne Allen Sharp for battery/assault and battery on police officer  
 State of Oklahoma v. Dillion Richard Smith for possession of controlled drug (meth) with intent to distribute  
 State of Oklahoma v. Christopher Neil Spurgeon for malicious injury to property over \$1,000  
 State of Oklahoma v. Blake Austin Youngblood for burglary in the third degree

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