



Emergency Preparedness

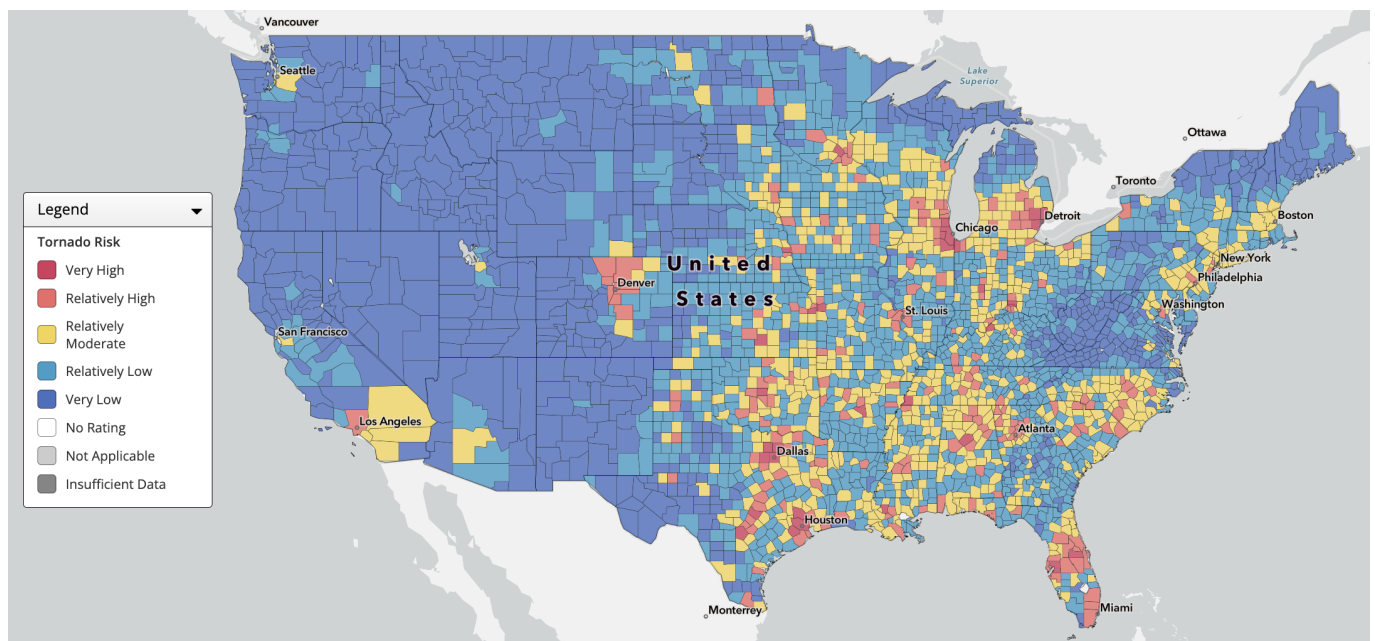
## Tornado Preparedness: Is Your Business Ready?

Matt Morgan | Jul 17, 2025

If you're doing business in Tornado Alley in the central U.S., you know that twisters are a way of life. More tornadic activity occurs each year in this region—including Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota and adjoining states—than most other places on Earth.

Businesses in many other parts of the country need to be ready for tornadoes, too. Risks are relatively high or very high in counties near Los Angeles, Denver, St. Louis, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, Miami, Philadelphia and New York, according to *data from the Federal Emergency Management Agency*.

In 2024, *tornadic activity was the second highest since records began*, with six states experiencing the most tornadoes ever. Property damage from these types of storms in the U.S. has fluctuated over the last five years, but in 2023 the bill was \$1.3 billion, according to *Statista*.



FEMA's National Risk Index: [hazards.fema.gov/nri/map](https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/map)

To be ready for tornadoes, employers must proactively prepare to minimize disruptions, protect their workforce and reduce potential damages.

## Before the Storm: Time to Prepare

In his previous role as a firefighter, Mark Welch responded to two businesses struck by tornadoes. Because they were prepared, he recalls, they sustained damage but no human casualties.

"The main thing with any emergency plan is you're trying to prevent loss of life," he says.

Now, as an MSC industrial safety consultant, Welch knows firsthand the value of preparing for tornadoes. "Prepping and training are key with any emergency planning, including tornadoes," he says.

### Understanding Tornado Alert Levels

Part of preparing for a tornado is paying attention to weather reports. The **National Weather Service** has three alert levels for tornadoes:

A **tornado watch** occurs when a tornado is possible in the area based on the weather conditions. Watch areas are usually broad. The weather service says that during a watch, you should: "Review and discuss your emergency plans, take inventory of your supplies and check your safe room. Be ready to act quickly if a warning is issued or you suspect a tornado is approaching."

A **tornado warning** is issued when a tornado is spotted or weather radar indicates that one is in the area. "There is imminent danger to life and property," the weather service says. "Warnings typically encompass a much smaller area (around the size of a city or small county) that may be impacted by a tornado identified by a forecaster on radar or by a trained spotter/law enforcement who is watching the storm."

A **tornado emergency**, while rare, occurs when a tornado has touched down in the area. These are severe threats to life and property.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) says that employers should have an **emergency action plan** for the workplace that includes details on where to take shelter, policies on accounting for everyone at the site, and procedures for addressing hazardous materials.

"Tornadoes can occur with little or no warning," OSHA says on its **tornado preparedness and response webpage**. "Taking precautions in advance of the storms, such as developing an emergency plan, learning the warning signs, and monitoring tornado watches and warnings, can help you stay safe if a tornado occurs in your area."

**Read more: *Embrace Year-Round Emergency Planning with Modern Training Solutions***

**"Prepping and training are key with any emergency planning, including tornadoes."**

Mark Welch  
MSC

Emergency plan training is **required by OSHA** as a way for employees to understand what they should do when a tornado or other severe weather looms. Under OSHA regulations, certain employees must be designated to help with evacuation.

“Who’s grabbing the first-aid kit?” Welch says. “Who’s grabbing the AED? Who’s grabbing some water?”

Employers must also have an alarm system that alerts all employees to an emergency. “Whatever it is, even if it’s three loud blasts of an air horn, that means a tornado and let’s get into the shelter,” he says. “That’s why you do the training.”

## Business Continuity Planning: Minimizing Operational Disruption

Tornadoes are incredible forces of nature. They rotate at wind speeds of 65 to 200-plus mph and travel up to 60 mph along the ground, leaving a wake of destruction in their path. Entire buildings can be decimated.

If your business is affected, will you be able to recover? You’d be bucking the trend—according to the U.S. Small Business Administration, 9 in 10 businesses fail within two years of being hit by a disaster.

Employers with a **business continuity plan**, on the other hand, have procedures in place for minimizing operational disruption.

An effective continuity plan prioritizes business functions with the highest financial impact, identifies the resources needed to cover those critical functions, communicates the plan companywide, and is reviewed periodically and adjusted as needs change.

## Post-Tornado Recovery: Managing Insurance and Cost Control

Before you get into an emergency situation, make sure that you have insurance and you understand what it covers. “Does your insurance pay for repair, rebuild, losses?” Welch says. “All of those type of things you would want to look at in your insurance plan.”

### ***Read more: Severe Weather Preparedness for the Workplace***

Welch says emergency response companies can manage the storm repair at your site and ensure a safe working environment. “They come in, they clean everything up, even if it’s hazardous material,” he says. “So, do you have someone you can contact?”

Tornadoes can knock out power lines, essentially stopping all work even if your facility isn’t otherwise damaged. “You need lights, you need ventilation, you need electrical power,” Welch says. “If you want to keep the business going, and if the power’s gone, do you have **generators**?”

If equipment is minimally damaged, do you have repair parts or spare equipment to get the machines up and running?

“Do you have a spare building that you could possibly move some of the work to?” Welch says, offering one solution. “Maybe it’s a warehouse that’s a mile down the road that didn’t get hit. Can you move some of the equipment and continue manufacturing?”

The tornado-struck manufacturers that Welch encountered as a firefighter years ago certainly took steps like these, as he explains.

“Yes, there was loss from damages—that’s why you’ve got insurance. But there was no loss of life,” he says. “They cleared the debris off to make sure it was a safe working environment. They were able to put a temporary tarp over the roof. They got a generator in there and they were able to continue manufacturing.”

***Does your company have an emergency plan for tornadoes? Tell us about it in the comments below.***

