

SKYWARN TIPS

With severe weather season now just weeks away and the first couple of severe weather events occurring across the country, its time to learn a new term for severe weather spotting: ACES.

ACES stands for *Awareness, Communication, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones.*

With the Help of Spotter Network, the NWS SKYWARN program has released 10 tips for being a safe storm spotter.

1. Your safety is your number one priority. It trumps all other reporting objectives. You can always be a spotter another day if you remember this rule. As the spotter community unfortunately saw last year, when you take calculated risks while observing storms, sometimes the risks are not worth the outcome. Always be safe and come back another day. Timely and accurate reports can help others to be safe too.
2. Always following the directions of public safety officials. If asked to leave, move. Spotters are vital to public safety, but we are not public safety officials or first responders and, as such, should obey all applicable laws and directives.
3. Always follow the concepts of “**ACES.**” To some of us, “ACES” may be a new concept, but a practice we all have been doing from the beginning of time when SKYWARN started. ACES stands for Awareness, Communication, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones.

A Always be AWARE of your surroundings and use all available means to keep yourself aware of the weather situation.

C Always have means of COMMUNICATION. NOAA Weather Radio, Amateur Radio, Cell Phones, Internet.

E Always have at least two ESCAPE ROUTES between you and safe shelter. Practice the routes and know how long it will take you to get there at different times of the day. Know that road conditions change if you are a mobile spotter. What if there is

a traffic jam or accident? What are your alternatives? If a stationary spotter, where will you go at your location? Is the route to it unblocked? Is it unlocked?

S Finally, at the end of your escape route, you need a SAFETY ZONE, a place of shelter from the severe weather. It could be storm shelter, a basement, an interior closet or bathroom without windows. *Regardless of what it is, just like for fires, you have to have a plan and practice it.*

4. Always activate Emergency Services before making a spotter report if the report includes damage or injuries. Don't delay the call to 911. In a true emergency, use whatever means necessary to get your report to law enforcement / fire / ems. This will also get the message to Emergency Management.

Once you make that report, then contact the NWS so they can warn people downstream in the next community or county.

5. Never place yourself in a position to be overrun by or unprotected from a storm. See Tip #1.
6. Always be aware of what is above you. Lightning is one of thunderstorms biggest killers. Lightning likes tall objects such as trees, telephone poles, even the antennas on our vehicles. Don't make yourself a target by standing / parking next to a tall object. You may become lightning's next target. Also remember that tall objects, like trees, like to come down in the winds of the storms. Be aware of things around you that could be moved or carried around in a storm.
7. NEVER, EVER enter a flooded roadway by foot or vehicle. It's not necessary to do so to report how deep the water is. Flooding is the #1 killer annually from thunderstorms. Remember the saying, "*Turn Around, Don't Drown.*"
8. Treat all downed wires as energized. It may not be a power line, but most wires are aluminum or copper, which conduct electricity well. If there is a short between the lines, you could be

electrocuted. Stay away from and be on the lookout for downed lines.

9. Always obey all state, federal, local, and tribal laws and regulations. They are there for a reason. Practice defensive driving if mobile spotting. Match your driving speed and following distances with road conditions. Speed limits are set for dry summer conditions, not wet conditions. And before spotting, be sure that you are mentally and physically ready. It will help you make good decisions and keep you safe.
10. Keep safe if working anywhere near a roadway. Establish a “Hot Zone.” A “Hot Zone” is anywhere within 25 feet of a roadway or other area where there could be traffic. Many people are killed or severely injured every year while working within the “Hot Zone” by being struck by other vehicles. Try and avoid parking or standing near this area while spotting storms.

Motorists are naturally attracted to flashing lights. Your vehicle may have more lights on it than a 1970’s disco, but that may make you more likely to be hit than if you were to have no flashing lights at all.

Most states require the use of an ANSI approved reflective safety vest if you are within the “Hot Zone.” Your yellow ARES Reflective vests usually meet these standards. Check the tag on the vest to verify. Best bet of all is to not stop anywhere near the “Hot Zone.” Instead, park off the street in a parking lot. That will keep you out of the “Hot Zone” all together.

By following these 10 tips, you and your fellow spotters will have a safe, more enjoyable storm season.