

Use Helmets When Taking Shelter From Tornadoes

People should consider putting on a helmet when they take shelter from a tornado, says Adnan Akyuz, North Dakota's state climatologist and assistant professor of climatology in North Dakota State University's Soil Science Department.

"Most tornado experts will tell you to go to the basement, away from exterior walls and windows, and cover your head," he says. "Why not wear a helmet while taking shelter? Then you would have two free hands that can do something else, such as holding someone's hand in your family or hugging your kids, without compromising your own safety."

Most fatalities during a tornado event occur when a person is hit by flying debris. Tornadoes can reach rotational speeds in excess of 300 mph.

"Covering your head with your bare hands only provides you with limited protection," Akyuz says.

A helmet, which has proven to save lives in a crash, is an inexpensive and accessible item that can increase people's chances for survival if a tornado strikes their home. Helmets also are readily available; most households already have one or more of them.

North Dakota has an average of 21.7 tornadoes per year. The number ranged from two tornadoes in 1950 to 65 tornadoes in 1999. North Dakota has had 24 direct tornado-related fatalities since 1950.

"This number seems to be very small, but we are ranked No. 10 in the nation in number of fatalities per tornado," Akyuz says. "Advances in forecasting tornadoes, technology and public education will decrease the number of deaths and injuries."

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