

2020

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EXTREME WEATHER: GET A STEP AHEAD OF IT

Extreme weather isn't confined to any one season. That's especially true in the Central Plains, where both tornadoes and major blizzards have been known to occur in the fall. Whether it's extreme cold or maximum heat, taking time to prepare for those atypical occurrences can help lessen the toll it takes on animals and property.

"There are some foundational actions we can take to prepare ourselves for an extreme weather incident on the farm or ranch," Ashley Mueller, statewide Nebraska Extension Educator/Disaster Education Coordinator, says. "The number one strategy for dealing with extreme weather events is preparedness and communication planning."

Mueller advises farmers and ranchers to make a plan for keeping family members and employees informed about daily activities and locations part of an overall extreme weather strategy. Clearly communicating those daily details may be critical to resolving issues that are the result of severe weather events.

"Often, when events like this occur, our thoughts can become scrambled and we might struggle to recall just where other family members planned to be at the time," Mueller says. "If you're away from the farm site, make sure your cell phone is accessible and charged up. It may be helpful to carry an extra charger in the vehicle to ensure the phone is ready in an emergency. Make a habit of keeping everyone in your circle informed about your plans for the day."

If travel is a routine part of the day, preparing and maintaining a disaster kit with critical supplies can be of utmost importance when weather conditions suddenly change.

“I’ve seen kits as simple as a drawstring bag that holds band-aids, gauze, bottles of water, and the kinds of things that would be needed in an unexpected weather change,” Mueller says. “Keep the kit in the vehicle, or in a convenient place where you can grab it and go. In addition to medical supplies and food, consider keeping an extra phone charger, a flashlight and other pocket tools that might be needed. Taking time to reflect on what could have happened during severe weather can help identify the supplies and tools that would be helpful.”

Throughout the year, staying informed about weather forecasts can help avoid tragic outcomes resulting from weather conditions. Enabling phone apps to send notifications of weather conditions such as lightning strikes or tornado and blizzard watches and warnings make it easy to have up-to-date weather information throughout the day at most locations.

“It’s good to rely on two sources for weather information. Your local radio station will often break out of programming schedules to issue weather watches and warnings,” Mueller says. “If you’re in your office, weather information is readily available through either radio or television. If you’re away from home, have someone tracking weather for you so they can warn you of any impending threat. It all goes back to communicating with your circle.”

If severe weather does result in injury or property destruction, have a written plan that identifies the first person who should be notified. Keeping a list of people, which includes their contact information, can make the process of recovering from severe weather much easier to complete.

“If insurance is involved, be aware of what types of information they will need for a claim and whether or not they need to inspect the damage,” Mueller says. “Your plan may not include every detail, but the trauma that comes with these kinds of events can be overwhelming. Having a game plan ahead of time will make things easier for everyone involved.”

The written document should include detailed information a third party might need to know about the farm/ranch site, such as the location of utilities, water sources, etc. The document should be located where it’s easily accessible for any member of the circle or third party who needs it.

“No one wants to think they need to have a continuity plan in place, but that kind of road map makes it much easier to navigate through changes that come after a tragedy,” Mueller says.

In the current situation, with Covid-19 concerns, it’s helpful to consider how to interact with necessary persons to resolve storm damage. Maintaining the necessary supplies, such as masks, hand sanitizer, etc. will lessen the number of steps necessary to completing storm follow-up.

Nebraska Extension’s Weather Ready Farms certification program is designed to improve or increase resilience toward the impacts of extreme weather on Nebraska’s farms. The program recognizes and rewards Nebraska farmers who prioritize weather readiness and are committed to reducing the impact of extreme weather events on their farms.

The one- or two-year program is delivered locally or regionally, with local or regional Extension professionals coordinating the program and communicating with participants. The length of the program is dependent on a participant’s previous and current experience implementing crop management practices related to extreme weather and climate variation.

Elements of the program include an online Self-Assessment, participation in education that includes new research and ways to implement management strategies on the farm, verification of management strategies and receipt of a Weather Ready Farms certification.

Information about the program is available at <https://weather-ready.unl.edu/farms>. To participate, learn more or ask questions, contact Ashley Mueller at Ashley.mueller@unl.edu.

“Currently, farmers can receive certification in crop production through Weather Ready Farms,” Mueller says. “More categories will be added in the future.

“Blue-sky time is a good time to mentally walk through the potential issues severe weather could cause on the farm or ranch,” Mueller says. “Once your written plan is created, it’s actually a relief to know that you’ve worked through some of the scenarios. Our minds are much clearer when we’re not under stress. We’ll make better decisions. Even taking it slow and completing one or two elements of your plan at a time will be empowering.”

Funding for this educational article comes from the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.