

Spotter Reporting Procedures

<http://www.crh.noaa.gov/Image/pah/pdf/basicspotterguide.pdf>

- From radio or cellular phone-equipped vehicles, report severe weather observations to a central collection point and request them to relay the report to the National Weather Service.
- Law enforcement and Emergency Management spotters—report to your dispatcher or net controller via NAWAS, radio, cellular phone, or other direct communications links as prescribed by your Emergency Operations Plan.
- When the telephone is your only communications method, call your primary or alternate contact, and ask him or her to relay your report to the National Weather Service. If the call is long distance, you can make it collect.

Report promptly as the storm may interrupt communications.

Report Briefly:

What you have seen: tornado, funnel cloud, wall cloud, waterspout, flash flooding, etc.

Where you saw it: the direction and distance from a known location, i.e., 3 miles south of Beltsville. To avoid confusion, make sure you report the event location and not your location.

When you saw it: make sure you note the time of your observation.

What it was doing: describe the storm's direction and speed of travel, size and intensity, and destructiveness. Include any amount of uncertainty as needed, i.e., "funnel cloud; no debris visible at the surface, but too far away to be certain it is not on the ground."

Identify yourself and your location: Give spotter code number if you have one.

Report:

1. Tornado, funnel cloud, waterspout, or wall cloud.
2. Large hail, as defined by your local NWS office.
3. Damaging winds (usually greater than 50 mph).
4. Flash flooding.
5. Other criteria as defined by your local NWS office

Weather Events

Although reporting criteria may vary slightly depending on the spotter network and local needs, these are the events the National Weather Service would like to know about as soon as possible:

TYPE OF EVENT	WHEN TO REPORT	NWS WARNING CRITERIA/ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
TORNADO	Always Report - ALSO CALL 911	Tornado Warning Issued. <i>Look for debris on the ground</i>
FUNNEL CLOUD/ WALL CLOUD	Always Report	<i>Look for organized, persistent, sustained rotation</i>
HAIL	Report if Half-inch size or larger**	Severe Thunderstorm Warning Issued: 1 inch diameter or larger. Always report the largest size hailstone
WIND GUSTS	Report if 50 mph or higher	Severe Thunderstorm Warning Issued: Sustained 40 mph. Gusts to 58 mph or greater. Specify estimate or measurement
HEAVY RAIN/ FLOODING	1.0" rain/hr or greater for urban areas. 1.5" rain/hr or greater for rural areas. Also Call 911 for flooding.	Flash Flood Warning issued: Flooding that impacts roads, homes or businesses.
STORM DAMAGE	Always Report	Damage to structures (roof, siding, windows, etc) Damage to vehicles (from hail or wind) Trees or large limbs down Power/telephone poles or lines down Damage to farm equipment, machinery Or any other significant damage

**Quarter size hail (1.00 inch) is considered as severe weather hail.

Again, reports should provide as much detail as possible to describe the where, when, how, etc of the event.

Some commonly used hail sizes

Pea	.25 inch	Golf Ball	1.75 inch
Half-inch	.50 inch	Hen Egg	2.00 inch
Dime	.75 inch	Tennis Ball	2.50 inch
Nickel	.88 inch	Baseball	2.75 inch
Quarter	1.00 inch	Tea Cup	3.00 inch
Half Dollar	1.25 inch	Grapefruit	4.00 inch
Ping Pong Ball	1.50 inch	Softball	4.50 inch

General Guidelines for Estimating Wind Speeds

30-44 mph (26-39 kt)	Whole trees in motion. Inconvenient walking into the wind. Light-weight loose objects (e.g., lawn furniture) tossed or toppled.
45-57 mph (39-49 kt)	Large trees bend; twigs, small limbs break and a few larger dead or weak branches may break. Old/weak structures (e.g., sheds, barns) may sustain minor damage (roof, doors). Buildings partially under construction may be damaged. A few loose shingles removed from houses.
58-74 mph (50-64 kt)	Large limbs break; shallow rooted trees pushed over. Semi-trucks overturned. More significant damage to old/weak structures. Shingles, awnings removed from houses; damage to chimneys and antennas.
75-89 mph (65-77 kt)	Widespread damage to trees with large limbs down or trees broken/uprooted. Mobile homes may be pushed off foundation or overturned. Roof may be partially peeled off industrial/commercial/warehouse buildings. Some minor roof damage to homes. Weak structures (e.g., farm buildings, airplane hangars) may be severely damaged.
90+ mph (78+ kt)	Many large trees broken and uprooted. Mobile homes damaged. Roofs partially peeled off homes and buildings. Moving automobiles pushed off the road. Barns, sheds demolished.

HOW TO REPORT

Your severe weather report should be detailed but concise, and should address the following questions:

WHAT did you see?

WHERE did you see it? Report the location/approximate location of the event. Be sure to distinguish clearly between where you are and where the event is thought to be happening (“I’m 5 miles north of Mayberry. The tornado looks to be about 5 miles to my northwest”).

WHEN did you see it? Be sure that reports that are relayed through multiple sources carry the time of the event, NOT the report time.

Any other details that are important - How long did it last? Direction of travel? Was there damage? etc.

If you are unsure whether to report or not to report, GO AHEAD AND REPORT IT.