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## Out of the blue Summer weather can turn deadly in seconds

By Mollie Miller  
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Countless times during her childhood in Hampton, Va., Linda Kessler-Brown crouched behind the couch in her parent's living room, sealed her hands tightly to her ears and prayed for the storms that shook her home to pass quickly.

As a child, Kessler-Brown returned to her hiding spot behind the couch whenever the skies above the Chesapeake Bay threatened to unleash severe weather. Often, as she curled herself into a little ball and tried to forget about the storm raging outside, she wondered, "how do you hide from the sky?"

The answer to that question, Kessler-Brown eventually came to understand, is you don't. "You can't hide from Mother Nature," Kessler-Brown, now a Licensed Practical Nurse at Fort Rucker, Ala., said recently. "You have to learn to respect the weather because you are never going to get away from it."

Respecting the weather means understanding local weather threats and knowing what steps must be taken to ensure safety in even the most adverse weather conditions, according to Command Sgt. Maj. Tod Glidewell.

Glidewell, the senior noncommissioned officer at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center, said it is the duty of every Soldier to be aware of local weather threats and how protect themselves, their Families and their friends from severe weather.

"We know that weather drives the Army's ability to conduct combat operations and weather conditions must always be considered in mission planning," he said. "The same care taken in combat to mitigate weather threats should be taken stateside as well."

Although summer weather threats vary somewhat by region, there are some common phenomena that everyone should be aware of regardless of location.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 Christopher Volkert, senior maintenance/logistics officer at the USACR/Safety Center, said summer weather hazards include lightning, flash floods, tornadoes and hurricanes.



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## **Lightning**

Lightning kills more people in the United States in a year than tornadoes, according to officials at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

“If you can hear thunder, you are within range of lightning,” Volkert said.

When there is lightning in the area, NOAA officials advise anyone who is outside to seek shelter immediately. Safe shelters are fully enclosed buildings and do not include car ports, pavilions or picnic shelters. If a fully enclosed building is not available, seek shelter in a vehicle. If no building or vehicle is available, individuals caught outside during a storm should avoid lone trees, tall isolated objects and metal fences and poles.

## **Flash Floods**

Flash floods usually occur within a few minutes or hours of excessive rainfall, a dam or levee failure, or a sudden release of water held by an ice or debris jam, according to information released by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The number one weather-related killer in the U.S., flash flooding typically presents the biggest danger to those who think that a little water is no big deal.

“Flash floods can catch people because a storm one place could cause a flood somewhere else,” Volkert said.

Officials from the National Weather Service are quick to remind those who live in areas prone to flash floods that just six inches of fast-moving flood water can knock an adult off their feet and water that is two feet deep or more will float a car.

During periods when flash floods present an immediate threat, individuals caught outside should make their way to higher ground; stay away from drainage ditches, storm drains, high water and streams; and not attempt to cross flowing streams where the water is more than ankle high. If in a vehicle, never drive onto water covered roads – turn around and go another way.

## **Tornadoes**

NOAA officials estimate that in an average year, approximately 1,200 tornadoes cause 70 fatalities and 1,500 injuries nationwide. Although tornadoes can occur in any state at any time of the year, peak tornado occurrence in the southern states is March through May while tornado season peaks in the northern states during late spring and summer.

“Tornado safety begins with a plan,” Volkert said. “Know where you can take shelter in your home or work, practice tornado drills and identify a place for everyone to meet after a disaster.”

Volkert said the best shelter in most homes or buildings is provided by interior rooms or basements. During a tornado, stay away from windows, get as low as possible and use mattresses, sleeping bags or thick blankets as cover. If caught outside during a tornado, find the lowest ground available away from trees and vehicles, lay face-down and protect your head with your arms.

## **Hurricanes**

During the past few years, hurricanes coming out of the Atlantic have wreaked havoc on several areas along the country’s coast.

This year, officials are predicting an “above average” hurricane season with at least seven tropical storms developing into hurricanes from June 1 – Nov. 30.

“In this day and age, hurricanes are never a surprise,” Volkert said. “The key to staying safe, then, is listening to authorities and having an emergency plan and the resources needed to evacuate or to weather the storm and its after effects.”

Volkert said there are several things that should be considered long before a hurricane makes landfall. Soldiers and all their Family members should identify the safest areas in their home; plan escape routes; assess how vulnerable they are to flooding and high winds; and prepare an emergency kit.

### **Stay safe, stay connected**

While there are many things that can be done to prepare for severe weather this summer, Volkert said constant vigilance must play a part in all severe weather scenarios.

“No matter where you are or what you are doing, don’t disconnect yourself from the outside world,” he said. “Have a weather radio and monitor local television or radio stations for severe weather information.”

Glidewell said although there are many important things competing for a Soldier’s time in today’s busy Army, there is nothing that can’t wait until a bad storm passes.

“Don’t drive across a flooded road, don’t go out in a severe storm,” he said. “There is nothing that has to be done today that is worth risking your life or the lives of those around you.”

For more information about summer weather threats, visit [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov). Information about preparing home emergency kits is available at [www.acsim.army.mil/readyarmy](http://www.acsim.army.mil/readyarmy). For information about the Army’s Safe Summer Campaign, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

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### **Get a kit**

Officials recommend all home emergency kits include the following items:

Water—at least one gallon per person per day for at least three days

Food—nonperishable food for at least three days, consider items such as energy bars, freeze dried foods and dehydrated foods.

Formula and diapers for any infants

Food, water, other supplies and documents for any pets

Manual can opener

Flashlight, NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) battery-powered weather radio, battery-powered cell phone charger and extra batteries or hand crank powered devices

First aid kit with dust masks, rated to at least N95, disinfectant and prescription medications

Sanitation supplies such as disinfectant and garbage bags

Important documents in watertight packaging—personal, financial and insurance—store copies in a separate location (safety deposit box, relatives or trusted friend)

Family emergency plan and local maps

**Source: Ready Army**