

Special Report: Tornado Risk and Emergency Weather Alerts Put Manitoba and Saskatchewan Worksites on High Alert



Severe weather conditions from the United States have travelled north, affecting the vast majority of Manitoba and Saskatchewan residents, with some concerned citizens as far east as Ontario even reporting consistent thunderstorms and rain. However, a bit of drizzle doesn't compare to what Manitobans and Saskatchewanians are currently living through: floods, tornadoes, and hen egg-sized hail.

Occupational health and safety (OHS) managers across Manitoba and Saskatchewan are facing a heightened weather threat as severe thunderstorms, large hail, damaging winds, flooding, and potential tornadoes impact the Prairies. Recent forecasts have identified a volatile weather pattern capable of producing rotating supercell thunderstorms, particularly across southern Manitoba and southeastern Saskatchewan. At the same time, parts of western Manitoba are dealing with flooding concerns following heavy rainfall and repeated storm activity.

Meteorologists warn that a combination of heat, moisture, and atmospheric instability is creating ideal conditions for severe weather development. Southern Manitoba, including Brandon, Winnipeg, and communities near the Saskatchewan border, faces the greatest risk of large hail, destructive

wind gusts, torrential rainfall, and isolated tornadoes. Some reports have already documented tornado sightings and warnings associated with recent storm systems.

For employers, these events serve as a reminder that emergency preparedness is not optional, especially for workplaces with outdoor operations or workers exposed to changing environmental conditions.

Industries Most at Risk

Several sectors face elevated exposure to severe weather hazards:

- Construction and infrastructure projects
- Agriculture and farming operations
- Transportation and logistics
- Utilities and telecommunications
- Oil, gas, and mining operations
- Forestry and natural resource industries
- Warehousing and outdoor distribution facilities
- Municipal public works and road maintenance crews

Workers in these industries may be exposed to flying debris, lightning strikes, flooding, structural collapse, vehicle incidents, falling trees, power outages, and sudden tornado development.

Workplace Weather Preparedness Best Practices

OHS managers should review emergency response plans immediately and ensure workers understand severe weather procedures before conditions deteriorate.

1. Monitor Weather Alerts Continuously

Assign responsibility for monitoring Environment and Climate

Change Canada alerts, local emergency notifications, and severe weather warnings throughout the workday. Conditions can change rapidly during severe thunderstorm events.

2. Establish Clear Shelter Procedures

Identify designated shelter locations for tornadoes, severe thunderstorms, and high-wind events. Workers should know exactly where to go when a warning is issued and how they will be notified.

3. Suspend Outdoor Operations When Necessary

Develop clear stop-work criteria for:

- Tornado watches and warnings
- Lightning within a defined radius
- High wind advisories
- Flash flooding conditions
- Severe thunderstorm warnings

The cost of downtime is insignificant compared to the consequences of a serious injury or fatality.

4. Secure Equipment and Materials

Inspect sites for unsecured materials, scaffolding, tools, temporary structures, and equipment that could become airborne during high winds.

5. Review Flood Response Plans

Heavy rainfall and localized flooding can occur with little warning. Employers should identify flood-prone areas, establish evacuation routes, and ensure critical equipment and hazardous materials are protected from water damage. Manitoba emergency officials continue to emphasize flood preparedness and response planning.

6. Verify Emergency Communications

Ensure all workers can receive alerts through multiple channels, including text messaging systems, radios, mobile apps, and supervisory communication trees.

7. Maintain Emergency Supplies

Worksites should maintain accessible emergency kits containing:

- First aid supplies
- Flashlights and batteries
- Emergency radios
- Drinking water
- High-visibility apparel
- Emergency contact information

A Compliance Game Plan for Employers

Employers have a legal duty to protect workers from foreseeable hazards, including severe weather risks. A proactive compliance strategy should include:

- Conducting weather-related hazard assessments.
- Documenting emergency response procedures.
- Training workers on severe weather recognition and response.
- Conducting evacuation and shelter-in-place drills.
- Inspecting emergency equipment regularly.
- Reviewing contractor and visitor emergency procedures.
- Recording incidents, near misses, and corrective actions.

Weather-related emergencies should also be incorporated into broader business continuity and emergency preparedness programs.

Safeguarding Business Operations Before It's Too Late

Organizations operating in affected areas should not assume severe weather will provide advance notice. Tornadoes, flash flooding, and severe thunderstorms can develop rapidly, leaving little time for decision-making.

Business leaders should review insurance coverage, backup power capabilities, data protection measures, supply chain contingencies, and remote-work options where feasible. Critical infrastructure, vehicles, and equipment should be protected or relocated when severe weather warnings are issued.

As climate-related weather extremes continue to affect North American workplaces, organizations that invest in preparedness, training, and emergency planning will be better positioned to protect workers, reduce downtime, and maintain operational resilience.

Review your organization's emergency preparedness program today and ensure your teams have access to the latest resources from OHS Insider on [emergency preparedness](#), [first aid readiness](#), and [environmental hazard response](#).

Sources: [The Weather Network](#), [CBC](#)