

# Disasters Avoided

## NEBRASKA ARBOR DAY 2024 TORNADO

### Early warnings save lives

- Early warnings and overlapping communications reduce morbidity and mortality.
- Disaster risk knowledge is vital for households to take protective action.
- The downsizing of federal support for organizations responsible for issuing early warnings and alerts will be detrimental to the health and well-being of communities throughout the United States.

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A destroyed home in Washington County, Nebraska, following the Arbor Day tornado (public domain photo from NWS Omaha/Valley).



On 26 April 2024 (Arbor Day), a tornado outbreak occurred in eastern Nebraska, including an EF-4 tornado with a path length of more than 50 km through Washington and Douglas counties. Despite causing over US\$8 million in public infrastructure damage in these two counties alone, there were no deaths or significant injuries. In household surveys conducted in-person in Washington County, nearly 80% of respondents indicated that members of their household knew the difference

between a tornado watch and warning, and 95% of households received at least one emergency alert. Most households received tornado warnings from television, text notifications, and word of mouth. Almost 90% of households knew where to shelter safely. The work of the National Weather Service (NWS) Omaha-Valley office was instrumental in reducing the negative human health impacts of the Arbor Day tornado outbreak. The public outreach and communications from NWS personnel outside of emergency events undoubtedly contributed to the disaster risk knowledge reported by households in affected communities and supported the taking of protective action. The Arbor Day tornado outbreak occurred during daylight hours, when everyone was attuned to the potential of severe weather. As storm dynamics shift and nocturnal tornadoes continue to cause disproportionate morbidity and mortality, it is important to consider how early and overlapping risk communication can address potential limited situational awareness.

#### Sources:

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