

Tailgate Safety Training

Volunteer Safety During Tornado and High-Wind Cleanup

Length: Approximately 10 minutes

Audience: Community volunteers assisting with debris removal and cleanup

Objective: Ensure every volunteer goes home safely at the end of the day.

Opening (1 minute)

Trainer Script

“Thank you for volunteering today. The damage we’re cleaning up was caused by a tornado or severe wind event. While the storm has passed, many hazards remain. Statistics show that cleanup and recovery work often causes more injuries than the storm itself. Our goal today is simple: no one gets hurt. If you remember one thing from this briefing, remember this: Nothing we clean up today is worth an injury.”

1. Situational Awareness (1 minute)

Key Points

- Conditions may change rapidly.
- Watch for unstable trees, hanging limbs, damaged structures, and shifting debris.
- Stop work immediately if conditions become unsafe.
- Report hazards to the volunteer leader.

Trainer Script

“Before you pick up a single branch, look around. Ask yourself: What could fall? What could shift? What could collapse? Many injuries occur because people focus on the debris in front of them and miss the hazard above or beside them.”

2. Electrical Hazards (2 minutes)

Key Points

- **Treat every downed wire as energized.**
- Stay at least 30 feet away from downed power lines.
- Never move wires, poles, transformers, or utility equipment.
- Do not enter damaged buildings if electrical hazards are present.
- Report power hazards immediately.

Trainer Script

“The most serious hazard we face is electricity. If you see a downed wire, stay away and keep others away. Assume every wire is live, even if it appears disconnected. Only utility crews should handle electrical equipment.”

Discussion Question

“What should you do if a tree limb is tangled with a power line?”

Answer: Stay away, secure the area, and notify supervisors or utility personnel.

3. Debris and Hand Injuries (1.5 minutes)

Key Points

- Wear work gloves at all times.
- Watch for nails, broken glass, metal roofing, and splintered wood.
- Lift carefully and inspect debris before moving it.
- Never reach into areas you cannot see.

Trainer Script

“Storm debris hides sharp objects. Roofing metal, shattered glass, nails, and broken fencing can cause serious injuries. Always look before you grab.”

Reminder

If you receive a puncture wound, report it immediately and seek medical attention if necessary—rusty metal and contaminated debris may require a tetanus evaluation.

4. Lifting and Moving Debris (1.5 minutes)

Key Points

- Use team lifts for heavy items.
- Lift with your legs, not your back.
- Avoid twisting while carrying.
- Take smaller loads rather than one oversized load.
- Ask for help.

Trainer Script

“Back injuries are among the most common cleanup injuries. If something feels too heavy, it probably is. Get help. We are here as a team.”

Demonstration

Show proper lifting posture:

- Feet shoulder-width apart
- Bend knees
- Keep load close
- Stand up with legs

5. Equipment and Chainsaw Safety (1 minute)

Key Points

- **Only trained individuals should operate chainsaws, skid loaders, tractors, or other power equipment!**

- Other volunteers can play important roles hauling debris, directing traffic, and other vital tasks!
- Stay clear of operating equipment.
- Maintain eye contact with equipment operators.
- Never walk behind moving machinery.

Trainer Script

“If you are not trained and authorized, do not use chainsaws or heavy equipment. Volunteers can provide tremendous help without operating hazardous tools.”

6. Heat, Hydration, and Fatigue (1 minute)

Key Points

- Drink water regularly.
- Take breaks.
- Watch for dizziness, confusion, headache, or excessive fatigue.
- Look out for each other.

Trainer Script

“Many volunteers push themselves too hard. Heat stress and exhaustion can happen quickly, especially when people are focused on helping others. Drink water before you’re thirsty.”

Know the difference: Heat exhaustion (heavy sweating, weakness, cool/pale skin) requires rest, shade, and fluids. Heat stroke (hot/red skin, rapid pulse, confusion, unconsciousness) is a medical emergency—call 911 immediately.

7. Traffic and Equipment Awareness (30 seconds)

Key Points

- Be alert for trucks, trailers, loaders, and emergency vehicles.
- Wear high-visibility clothing when working near roads.
- Designate volunteers to direct traffic in order to maintain a safe work zone.
- Stay out of traffic lanes whenever possible.

Trainer Script

“Cleanup areas are busy places. Don’t assume drivers or equipment operators can see you.”

8. Stop-Work Authority (30 seconds)

Key Points

Every volunteer has the authority (and responsibility) to stop work at any time if:

- A power line is discovered
- A structure appears unstable
- Severe weather approaches
- Someone is injured
- An unsafe condition develops

Trainer Script

“If you see something unsafe, stop and speak up. Nobody will get in trouble for stopping work because of a safety concern.”

Closing Safety Message (30 seconds)

Trainer Script

“Today’s mission is to help this community recover. We want everyone to go home in the same condition they arrived—or better. Work safely, stay aware of your surroundings, drink water, wear your PPE, and ask for help when needed. Cleanup can wait. Safety cannot.”

Final PPE Check

Before beginning work, verify:

- Work gloves
- Sturdy boots/shoes
- Long pants
- Eye protection (recommended)
- High-visibility vest/shirt if near traffic
- Water bottle

Safety Motto: “Slow down, look up, look around, and go home safe.”

Sources

Created with assistance from ChatGPT using the following sources:

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). [Tornado Preparedness and Response: Response/Recovery.](#)
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). [Flood Preparedness and Response: Tree and Debris Removal.](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). [Safety Guidelines: After a Tornado.](#)
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). [Tornado Cleanup and Response.](#)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). [Guidelines for Cleaning Safely After a Disaster.](#)

Additional Resources

Indiana PREPared. [Tornado and Wind Damage Response and Recovery.](#)

Indiana PREPared. [Spring and Summer Severe Weather Resources.](#)

Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN). [Hazard Resource Dashboard.](#)

Behnken, T.J., Cochran, S., & Mueller, A. (2020). [Flooded with Volunteers: A Guide to Managing 4-H Youth and Adult Volunteers During Disaster Recovery.](#) UNL Extension EC3048.