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Co-op member provides shelter from the storm

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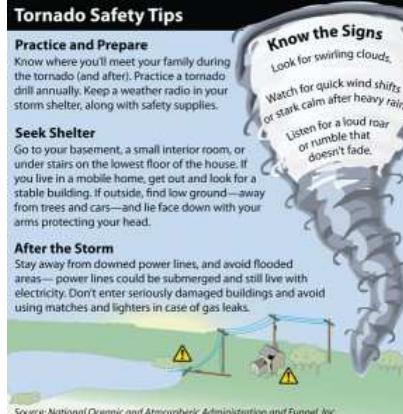
Sometimes a tragedy provides a spark of an idea for a solution. In 2002 a tornado destroyed several homes near where Don Guymon and his wife, Betty, lived. Members of Tri-County Electric Cooperative in Mt. Vernon, Ill., the Guymons were alarmed by the lack of shelters for people who lived in vulnerable housing like mobile and modular homes and decided that an affordable storm shelter needed to be readily available in the Midwest where tornados often strike in the spring.

After researching FEMA design criteria and working with engineers who specialize in wind engineering, Guymon designed and tested an above ground storm shelter made of concrete and steel that exceeded FEMA standards. He began manufacturing the shelters that same year with just five employees, and the company now sells and installs about 300 shelters a year and employs 16 people.

Don served as a director for Tri-County Electric Cooperative, Mount Vernon, Ill., for 27 years and has also farmed 700 acres for over 50 years. Having lived in southern Illinois all his life, he understands first-hand, the importance of rural families being prepared for severe weather.

"Farmers and people who live in rural areas are on their own and responsible for their family's safety," Guymon says. "We've always been independent, and we know that we have to have whatever is necessary to get through bad weather – generators, heavy equipment or storm shelters. When the weather gets bad, we don't have time to load up and head to a community shelter, and there aren't tornado sirens in the country. Having a storm shelter is a critical piece of a rural family's emergency plan. I wish we would have had one when my kids were small."

Guymon is still actively involved in the day-to-day operation of Safe Sheds, Inc. and works diligently on product and manufacturing process improvement. He is joined by his daughter and son-in-law who help manage the business in Salem, Ill. Factory tours and more information about the storm shelters are available by


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April is Tornado Awareness Month but May is historically the peak month for tornadoes in Illinois. Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) Director James K. Joseph says Illinois experienced 48 tornadoes in 2014, which resulted in two injuries and nearly \$5 million in damage to homes and crops. In 2013, the state saw 54 tornadoes, including 25 twisters on Nov. 17, a vivid reminder that tornadoes and severe storms can happen anytime of the year.

"We can't prevent dangerous storms from occurring," says Joseph. "However, there are ways to prepare to help you stay safe when severe weather strikes. We encourage everyone to learn more about severe weather hazards, identify a safe place to go during storms, and assemble and maintain an emergency supply kit. These actions could help save your life or the lives of your loved ones."

IEMA and the National Weather Service developed a Severe Weather Preparedness Guide, which provides information about tornadoes, severe storms, lightning and flooding along with recommended actions to take before, during and after each of these weather events. It is available on the Ready Illinois website at www.Ready.Illinois.gov or by calling (217) 785-9925. Preparedness tips and information are also available through the Ready Illinois Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/ReadyIllinois) and Twitter Page (twitter.com/ReadyIllinois).

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