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The briefing provides a historical summary (2010–2025) of significant weather-related incidents and impacts affecting Christian churches across the United States. Its objective is to support Clinton County (Ohio) Church Safety and Security Teams in recognizing weather-related hazards, understanding building vulnerabilities, and strengthening sheltering and emergency procedures.

This report contains limited preparedness and mitigation recommendations to assist local faith-based organizations in planning and training. It includes no classified, law-enforcement-sensitive, or privileged material and may be freely shared among churches, clergy, volunteers, and partner organizations for safety planning, training, and coordination purposes.

Church Weather Threat Briefing (2010 – 2025)

Published: Wednesday, 12 November 2025

Target Audience: Church leaders, Safety / Security Teams, and volunteers in Clinton County Ohio (and border county communities).

Executive Summary

Church facilities are repeatedly impacted by tornadoes, damaging straight-line winds, lightning-caused fires, and secondary hazards (roof collapse, flying debris, glass failure, power loss). In the Midwest/Ohio Valley, peak threat runs March–June, with a secondary season in November. Case histories since 2010 show common failure modes—large-span sanctuaries, unprotected glazing, unsecured exterior doors, and limited interior refuge space—and recurring operational gaps in alerting, sheltering flow, and accountability.

Clinton County tornado climatology: Since 1950, 29 recorded tornadoes in the county, with May the peak month (~35% of all events). Local occurrence peaks in the late afternoon/early evening (≈3–7 PM), but the record also includes night and pre-dawn touchdowns (e.g., 10:01 PM on 4/8/2020, 9:27 PM on 5/7/2024, 12:47 AM on 7/30/2024, and an early-morning EFO near Sabina on 4/3/2025). This confirms a credible nocturnal risk and the need for redundant, audible alerting during services and overnight activities.

Bottom line for Clinton County: Prepare for rapid shelter decisions during worship and events, harden predictable weak points (glass, wide-span roofs, vehicle approach), and rehearse a short, simple movement plan to pre-identified safe areas on the lowest interior level. Churches with written plans, posted maps, practiced drills, and redundant alerting consistently report fewer injuries and faster recovery.

Recent Historical Timeline & Profiles (Selected, 2010–Present)

- **2010 – Monroe, OH – Lightning Fire (“Touchdown Jesus”).** A prominent outdoor Jesus statue at Solid Rock Church was struck by lightning and destroyed by fire. Takeaways: Lightning risk is real for tall statuary, steeples, and roof crosses; ensure NFPA-compliant lightning protection, bonding, and surge protection across AV, security, and life-safety systems.
- **2011 – Joplin, MO – EF5 Tornado (St. Mary’s Parish Complex).** Parish church and school were destroyed in the EF5 tornado; only the cross remained standing. Takeaways: Wide-span sanctuaries/gymnasiums are high-risk collapse zones. Identify interior, small-room refuges and practice time-compressed movement (≤2 minutes).
- **2013 – Moore/OKC, OK – Tornado Strikes Churches During Relief Cycle.** Multiple churches sustained damage amid back-to-back outbreaks; congregations pivoted to relief while rebuilding. Takeaways: Plans should include continuity of worship and relief ops: off-site agreements, mutual-aid with partner churches, and pre-positioned supplies.
- **2019 – Dayton, OH – Memorial Day Tornadoes (Multiple Churches Damaged).** Queen of Martyrs and Union Chapel Community Church suffered heavy to catastrophic damage (roof loss, collapse). Takeaways: Roof and bell-tower failures generated hazardous interior debris. Post clear “avoid zones” (sanctuary, narthex skylights) for warnings.
- **2020 – Nashville, TN – Overnight Tornado Outbreak (Historic Churches).** Severe damage to historic sanctuaries; multi-year rebuilds. Takeaways: Historic structures need engineer-reviewed shelter areas, door-control plans, and after-hours alerting for night activities.
- **2024 – Logan County, OH (Indian Lake) – EF3 Tornado; Churches As Shelters.** Local churches opened as public shelters and distribution points post-strike. Takeaways: Pre-identify host roles (shelter, warming/cooling, supplies), generator/fuel plans, and sanitation for surge crowds; coordinate with county EMA.
- **2024 – Barnsdall, OK – EF4 Tornado (St. Mary’s Church Damaged).** A church sustained heavy damage during a violent tornado; community experienced repeated hits in same season. Takeaways: Expect repeat impacts within a season; verify roof/wall repairs account for wind uplift and progressive collapse risk.
- **2025 – St. Louis, MO – EF3 Tornado (Church Collapse/Fatalities).** An EF3 destroyed a 121-year-old church; occupants were trapped inside rubble; 911 congestion noted. Takeaways: Communications redundancy (text groups, radio talk-outs, weather radio) and accountability procedures are vital when 911 is saturated.
- **2025 – Tahlequah, OK – EF1 Tornado (Lutheran Camp, 100+ Present).** Overnight tornado during camp session; staff moved campers into designated storm shelters; no deaths. Takeaways: Pre-designated, signed shelters and after-hours leadership roles directly reduce casualties.

Patterns, Building Vulnerabilities & Operational Gaps

- **High-risk spaces:** Large sanctuaries, gym/fellowship halls, narthexes (entryway, foyer, or enclosed vestibule at the entrance of a church located between the main doors and the main worship area) with skylights, glassy lobbies, porticos, and rooms beneath long-span roofs.
- **Exterior hazards:** Unprotected glazing, unsecured doors that blow inward, steeples/crosses/bell towers, and vehicle approach lanes that funnel debris.
- **Alerting gaps:** Reliance on sirens only; no NOAA Weather Radio, no push alerts during worship, single-point failure on a single phone.
- **Movement friction:** Narrow stairs, locked interior corridors, unclear signage, accessible seating without assigned helpers.
- **Accountability & reunification:** No rosters, no “last-man sweeps,” no off-site reunification point when building is damaged.
- **Continuity:** No plan for alternate worship site, generator/fuel, or rapid debris/board-up contractors.

Clinton County (OH) Risk Picture & Triggers for Action

- Primary season: March–June; secondary: November.
- Action triggers during services:
 - Severe Thunderstorm Warning with measured/indicated winds ≥ 70 mph or Tornado Watch → Warning within county polygon.
 - CCEA or NWS polygon that includes the church geolocation.
 - Observed cues: roaring wind, sudden power loss with rising wind, debris impacts, rapid cloud rotation nearby.

Shelter Plan – What “Good” Looks Like

- Pre-Designate Safe Areas
 - Lowest level, **interior rooms/hallways, no windows, strong walls** (preferably masonry/core).
 - Post **simple A-B-C zone maps** at entrances and along routes; match to pew/section assignments.
- Two-Minute Movement Goal
 - Train ushers/greeters to point and move, not debate. Prioritize children, mobility-limited, and choir.
 - Keep stairwells clear; pre-stage folding keys for locked interior corridors.
- Role Cards
 - **Decision Lead:** Pastor or designee; initiates shelter order.
 - **Alert Lead:** Weather radio + phone apps + CCEA; carries backup handheld.
 - **Flow Leads:** Ushers by section; each owns a zone.
 - **Care Leads:** Nursery/children; mobility assistance.
 - **Sweep Leads:** Last-man check of restrooms/cry rooms.

- **Accountability/Reunification Lead:** Roll-up headcount; announces all-clear and secondary site if needed.
- **Announcements (10-Second Script)**
 - “Weather warning—move now. Follow your usher to Zone A/B/C. Parents keep children with you. Stay away from windows. Doors will be closed behind you.”
- **Hardening Priorities (12–18 months)**
 - Film or shutters on lobby glass; secure exterior doors (wind-rated hardware).
 - Interior refuge improvements (reinforced door frames, safe-room criteria where feasible).
 - Lightning protection on steeple/statuary; surge protection across life-safety and AV.
 - Vehicle barriers where wind-thrown debris concentrates.
- **Redundancy & Sustainment**
 - NOAA Weather Radio (audible in sanctuary), dual alerting apps, CCEA enrollment for key staff.
 - Alerting Configuration Note: Ensure NOAA Weather Radios used within the church have all alerts programmed “off” (Tornado Warnings will remain on by default). This prevents unnecessary false activations while ensuring immediate warning for life-threatening events.
 - Lights-out kit in each refuge: flashlights, first aid/bleed kits, spare radio, door wedges, master keys.
 - Generator plan (portable or standby), fuel, labeled transfer switches, and quarterly test.
- **Drills & Documentation**
 - Quarterly micro-drills (ushers/security only), annual full drill (pre-service).
 - Recommend in conjunction with Ohio Severe Weather Awareness week (third week of March).
 - Post one-page shelter card in sacristy, pulpit, and AV booth.
 - Keep after-action notes (what slowed movement, comms gaps, door issues).

Quick Reference: Service Decision Matrix

Situation	Action	Notes
Severe T-storm Watch	Monitor	Assign Alert Lead; check NOAA radio.
Severe T-storm Warning (<70 mph)	Continue; Heightened Prep	Pre-stage ushers; unlock interior corridors.
Severe T-storm Warning (≥70 mph)	Shelter Now	Treat as tornado-equivalent wind risk.
Tornado Watch	Prep to pause service	Pre-brief ushers; review script.
Tornado Warning (polygon includes church)	Shelter Now	Use 10-second script; 2-minute goal.
Observed imminent threat	Shelter Now	Don't wait for official alert if danger is apparent.

Post-Event: Accountability, Hazards, and Continuity

- **Accountability:** Section leads report counts; Sweep confirms cleared areas.
- **Hazards check:** Gas leaks, electrical arcing, glass fall zones, unstable steeple/cross.

- **Continuity:** Move to pre-named alternate site if damage; announce via CCEA, social media, phone tree.
- **Documentation:** Rapid photos, damage notes, contractor call-list, insurer contact, debris safety perimeter.

Limited Recommendations (Next 90-days)

- Publish a one-page shelter map (A/B/C zones) and mount at all entries.
- Purchase and test NOAA Weather Radio; enroll leadership in CCEA.
 - EMA can setup your church with your own keyword and alert capability with key members having access to issue pre-formatted alerts.
- Run a pre-service drill (ushers/greeters/choir) with the 10-second script.
- Add Stop-the-Bleed kits + flashlights to each refuge; inventory quarterly.
- Get two quotes for glazing film on lobby/narthex glass; prioritize windward exposures.
 - If you select a one-way reflective glazing film, this allows security team members to observe exterior activity discreetly while limiting a potential aggressor's ability to see inside.
- Schedule a Clinton County EMA walk-through to validate shelter spaces and comms.

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