

Tornado warnings are too often ignored

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With big storms ripping across the Midwest, Bob Drost is hoping people are paying attention to the severe weather and tornado warnings.

Unfortunately, Drost, a doctoral student at Michigan State University, knows that many times those warnings are ignored, according to his research. "Only 63 percent understood that a warning is the most urgent National Weather Service statement during [severe weather](#)," he said.

Next week, Drost will present his research findings at the Geological Society of America's annual conference to fellow earth scientists and students. His study split subjects into two groups: those with episodic experience, witnessing tornados firsthand, and those who have semantic experiences or have collected their tornado knowledge from books, television, the Internet, or family and friends.

"There's a phenomenon associated with how people react and act to severe [storm](#) and tornado warnings," said Drost, who works in MSU's Geocognition Research Laboratory. "Much of it is based on people's prior experience with severe weather. It's comparable to biting into an apple with a worm in it. Eating part of a worm will affect how you decide about eating apples for the rest of your life."

Participants with episodic experiences exhibited a lower overall tendency to react to a tornado warning than those who have primarily semantic knowledge of tornadoes. But overall, it was the percentage of people who didn't acknowledge the severity of storm warnings that stood out to Drost.

Drost has seen the power of storms firsthand. While observing the arrival of 70 mph straight-line winds, he saw three trees blow over and made it into his house safely before losing his screen door to the storm. While he admits that he is drawn to big weather, he is hoping that his research will improve the National Weather Service's storm warning system as well as how people react to it.

"I'm planning on continuing my research on this topic," Drost said. "By working with the scientists and policymakers at organizations like the National Weather Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, I'm hoping to find better methods based on social, scientific and cognitive research that will cause people to react appropriately to storm and [tornado warnings](#)."

Provided by Michigan State University

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