



# Storms guide for businesses

13 March, 2015

# #01 THE FACTS

Severe thunderstorms are common in Australia and cause hundreds of millions of dollars worth of damage each year. They can occur anywhere in Australia and do so more frequently than any other natural hazard, including bushfires, cyclones and floods.

The Bureau of Meteorology defines a severe thunderstorm as one that produces:

- Hail with a diameter of 2cm or more
- Wind gusts of 90km/h or greater
- Flash floods
- Tornadoes
- Any combination of these



## HAIL

Hail accounts for almost half the damage caused by severe thunderstorms.

During the **1990 Sydney hailstorm**, hailstones reached up to 8cm in diameter, breaking thousands of windows and damaging cars.

### Calls to SES for help:

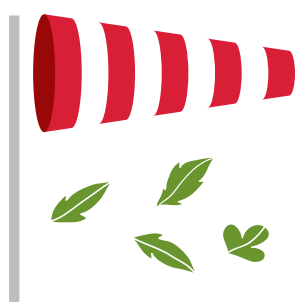
3500 in the first two days

### Properties damaged:

2000+

### Insurance payout:

exceeded \$1.3 billion (2011 value, ICA)



## WIND

Strong wind gusts are involved in approximately 40% of all severe thunderstorms.

During the **1991 Northern Sydney storm**, winds reaching 230km/h flung 7cm-diameter hailstones, causing extensive damage.

### Properties damaged:

7000+

### Power cuts:

164,000 homes

### Insurance payout:

\$525 million (2011 value, ICA)



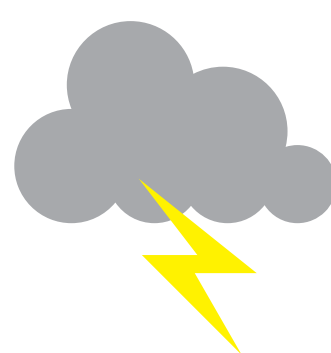
## FLASH FLOODS

Flash flooding can reach intensities of more than 100mm/h during or after a storm.

In **2003, a severe thunderstorm near Melbourne** caused flash flooding of up to 2m. Ten motorists trapped on the Eastern Freeway had to be rescued by boat.

### Insurance payout:

\$156 million (2011 value, ICA)



## LIGHTNING

Lightning accounts for more than 100 injuries annually in Australia and can strike up to 16km away from the centre of a storm.

A **2014 storm in Victoria** produced more than 80,000 individual lightning strikes in 24 hours, sparking a fire that destroyed a house and causing public transport chaos in Melbourne after the rail network was damaged.

# #02 MYTHS BUSTED



**MYTH:** Lightning doesn't strike water.

**BUSTED!**

**FACT:** Lightning can strike anywhere, including water. If you are boating or swimming during a storm, you should seek refuge immediately.



**MYTH:** Flash floods only occur along flowing streams or rivers.

**BUSTED!**

**FACT:** Flash floods can also occur in dry riverbeds and urban areas without natural waterways.



**MYTH:** My roof is not leaking, so I mustn't have any hail damage.

**BUSTED!**

**FACT:** Your roof could have small areas of damage from hailstones, which may break open at a future date. Make sure you have your roof inspected by a professional.



**MYTH:** A person struck by lightning carries a charge and should not be touched.

**BUSTED!**

**FACT:** People struck by lightning do not retain a charge. You should call for an ambulance and assist them immediately, after ensuring there are no further dangers around them.

# #03 BE PREPARED



**You should prepare your business for a storm as early as possible.**

## TO PREPARE YOUR PREMISES

- Secure or store items that could blow away in strong winds
- Investigate options to flood-proof your business. Where possible, use furniture, floor coverings and fittings made of flood resistant materials and store essential equipment and fittings well above floor level
- Ensure that stock, plants, equipment, furniture and fittings can be raised and/or removed quickly and easily
- Keep computer equipment off the floor
- Have a licensed electrician install a safety switch, or check that your current switch works by using the test button
- Know how and where to turn off your power, gas and water supply
- Check all electrical equipment is in good working order

## TO PREPARE YOUR BUSINESS

- Work out how your customers will contact you. Do you need to redirect phone calls? Can you access emails remotely?
- Ensure your insurance policy is current and adequate
- Have copies of your critical documentation (insurance, financial, legal, identification) in a portable waterproof container
- Back up critical data on a portable storage device, ensuring it is encrypted, password-protected and kept in a secure location that is not your usual business premises
- Prepare an emergency kit—see #04 for details

## TO PREPARE YOUR STAFF

- Develop an emergency plan for your staff
- Ensure your staff know the plan, and train new staff as you employ them
- Have an emergency contact list
- If you have staff on the road, make sure they know what to do in case of a storm (eg, avoid driving, seek shelter and provide regular updates on their safety if possible)—see #05 for details

## IN A SHOPPING CENTRE OR SHARED PREMISES

- Ensure you and your staff know the centre's official procedures for evacuations and emergencies
- Keep Centre Management and Centre Security contact details on your phone
- Ensure that all businesses on the premises agree on a pre-prepared emergency plan for weather events—see #05 for details

# #04 YOUR EMERGENCY KIT

Prepare your emergency kit before a storm and check it regularly to ensure the items are working and have not expired.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Australia's most costly storm to date occurred in Sydney in 1999. This intense thunderstorm was of a magnitude rarely seen in the world. It dropped enormous hailstones across the region. The largest measured hailstone had dimensions the size of a cricket ball.

**Properties damaged: 20,000+**

**Vehicles damaged: 40,000+**

**Aircraft damaged: 25**

**Insurance claims: \$4.3 billion**

**in less than one hour**

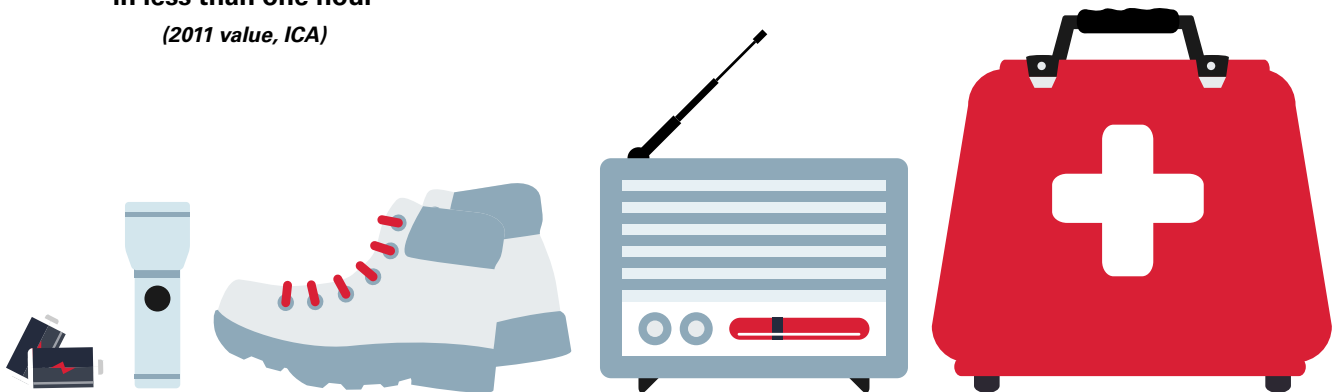
*(2011 value, ICA)*

## GENERAL ITEMS

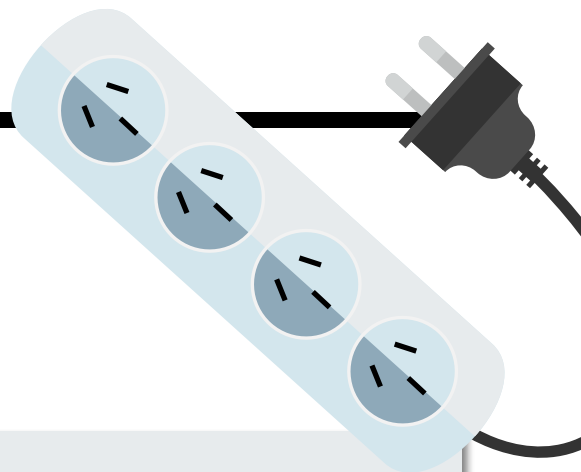
- Bottled water
- Enough non-perishable food for three days
- Battery-powered AM/FM radio
- Waterproof torch
- Spare batteries for both radio and torch
- First aid kit
- Emergency contact numbers
- Copies of your emergency plan
- A waterproof bag for valuables
- Rubber gloves

## ITEMS TO ADD BEFORE LEAVING YOUR BUSINESS PREMISES

- Money, bank/credit cards
- Medications and toiletries
- Important documents (insurance papers, staff and client contact lists)
- Mobile phone and charger



# #05 WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?



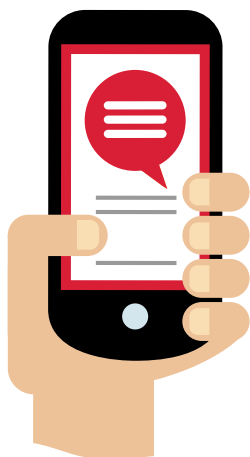
Every business should have a storm safety and survival plan. This will help to minimise potential business losses, keep your staff safe and ensure your business recovers quickly.



## DURING A STORM

- Unplug your electrical equipment as soon as you know a storm is on its way
- Never enter or travel through floodwater
- Do not use your landline telephone
- Stay indoors, clear of windows
- Watch for fallen trees and powerlines and damaged buildings
- Listen to your local radio station and other media for updates and advice
- If you are driving, put your hazard lights on and pull over to the side of the road, keeping clear of waterways and objects that might fall
- If you are outdoors, seek shelter clear of waterways and objects that might fall

# #06 WHAT NOW?



There may still be dangers even after a storm has passed.

## DO

- Listen to your radio, monitor emergency websites and follow local alerts and directions from emergency services
- Check your property for damage
- Stay clear of waterways and fallen trees and powerlines
- Check to see if your neighbours need help

## DO NOT

- Go sightseeing
- Eat food that has been in contact with floodwater
- Use gas or electrical equipment that has been exposed to floodwater
- Enter floodwater

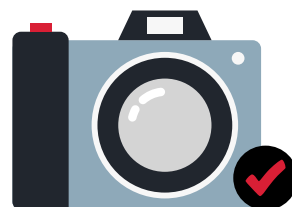
# #07 MAKING A CLAIM

**Your safety and that of your property is most important.**

If a storm damages your business and you need to make a claim, you should contact your insurer or broker promptly to lodge your claim. Depending on the situation, some insurers may provide emergency funds and deploy mobile claims teams once it is safe to do so.

**Your insurer is likely to ask you**

- If you can return to your property or not
- If there is immediate danger on your premises, such as possible roof collapse
- If any items on your premises seem salvageable
- If your vehicle is damaged or abandoned



**DO** Photograph the damage if it is safe to do so



**DO NOT** wash, clean, repair or remove debris from your premises without your insurer's consent

# #08 YOUR SAFETY

**Of course, storms are not the only emergencies that you may need to deal with. You may also need to prepare your business for bushfires, industrial accidents or chemical spills, coastal or tidal surges, floods or landslides.**

**For a bushfire guide for businesses, visit:**

[businessinsurancehub.com.au/essentials/bushfire-guide-businesses](https://businessinsurancehub.com.au/essentials/bushfire-guide-businesses)



This article is presented by AAI Limited ABN 48 005 297 807, AFSL 230859, trading as AAMI Business Insurance and is intended to be of a general nature only. AAI Limited does not accept liability for any loss incurred by reliance on this article. If you are interested in finding out more about adequate insurance cover for your business, contact your insurer.