

Tornadoes!

Nature's Danger

Have you ever gotten caught in a bad storm? It can be a scary experience! Bad storms might have powerful winds, heavy rain, blinding snow, or other kinds of extreme weather. One of the most dangerous storms of all is a tornado. On average, about 800 tornadoes occur each year in the United States. These tornadoes cause about 80 deaths and 1,500 injuries a year.

What Is a Tornado?

Tornadoes often look like funnel-shaped clouds, wide at the top and skinny at the bottom. The truth is that tornadoes are

not really clouds. Tornadoes are actually a column of air located between a strong thunderstorm and the ground. During a tornado, this column of air spins round and round, faster and faster. The air gets its power from the thunderstorm and spins so quickly and violently that it can pick up and destroy almost anything in its path.

As the tornado moves across the land, it creates a path of damage that can be more than one mile wide and 50 miles long. The weakest tornadoes might last from one to ten minutes, but the most violent tornadoes can last for more than an hour.



What's Dangerous about Tornadoes?

Although they look like funnel-shaped clouds, most tornadoes are actually invisible until their strong winds pick up and carry the dirt, dust, and debris in their path. These strong winds are what make tornadoes so dangerous. The wind speeds in the most violent tornadoes can be 250 miles per hour. The highest tornado wind speed on record is 318 miles per hour. These violent and strong winds act like a powerful vacuum, pulling things off the ground.

The powerful, spinning winds inside the funnel cloud can tear apart houses, lift up cars, and uproot trees. When people get hurt by tornadoes, it is usually because they are tossed around in the wind or hit by flying glass or garbage.

Thunderstorms during a tornado can also be dangerous. They can cause flash floods and lightning strikes. Hail, balls of ice, can also fall during a powerful tornado and thunderstorms. This can cause damage to property and crops. The size of hailstones can range from the size of an apple seed to the size of a whole grapefruit!

Beware of Tornadoes!

Tornadoes can occur anywhere, but in the United States, most of them happen in the states that are part of "Tornado Alley." These states are in the middle of the country. Tornadoes can occur during any month of the year, but most happen between March and August.

Your weather reporter can warn of tornadoes, but you'll want to be aware of the signs, too. Look for dark skies that have a greenish color. You might see a wall cloud in the distance. This is a cloud that seems to drop down from the sky. Large hailstones are often part of a tornado, along with a loud roar.

Listen to the weather reports in your area, but don't forget to keep your eyes and ears open, too.

Stay Safe During a Tornado!

If a tornado approaches your area, there are things you can do to stay safe.

Stay out of cars. The strong winds of a tornado can lift a car right off the ground. Also, don't try to outrun a tornado by car. Tornado winds can be faster than any car, even a race car!

Find a sturdy shelter, such as a basement or cellar. If there are no underground shelters, find a room inside and on the bottom floor. Hide under a stable piece of furniture, if possible, to protect yourself from flying debris.

Stay away from windows. Tornadoes can blow out windows, and the flying glass is extremely dangerous.

Although tornadoes are rare, they can occur anywhere and anytime. Be aware and be prepared and stay safe!