

Tornadoes

INTRODUCTION

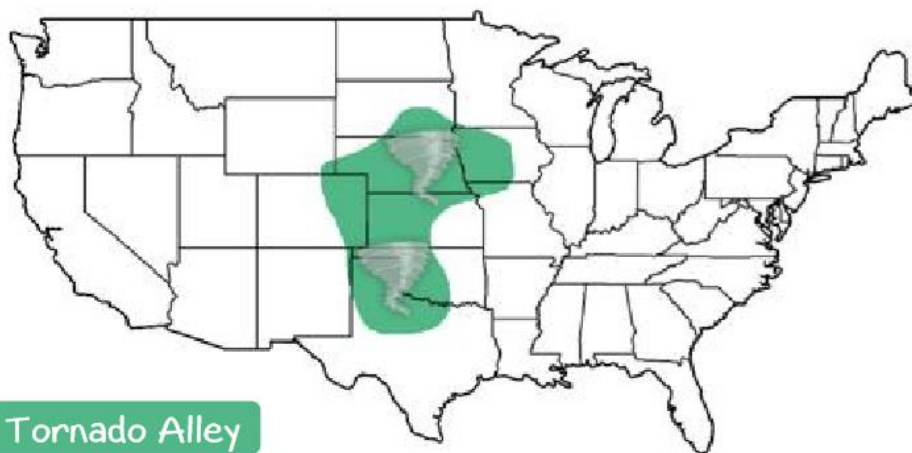
A tornado is a violent storm with a spinning tube of air that extends from a thunderstorm to the ground. They look like a narrow funnel that reaches from a cloud. A funnel cloud is a spinning cone-shaped column of air extending from a thunderstorm. But, it does not touch the ground. When the funnel reaches the ground it is called a tornado.



Most tornadoes only last for a few minutes and are barely noticeable. However, some others can be very violent and destructive. They can destroy homes, peel the roofs of buildings, knock down trees and even toss cars into the air!

Tornadoes are capable of damaging areas which can be a mile wide or as long as 50 miles. It moves at speeds ranging between 25 and 90 miles per hour. But the winds of the storm can reach speeds of up to 300 miles per hour!

Most tornadoes occur in the United States, around 1,200 per year. However, these violent storms happen in every continent. The deadliest and most destructive tornadoes

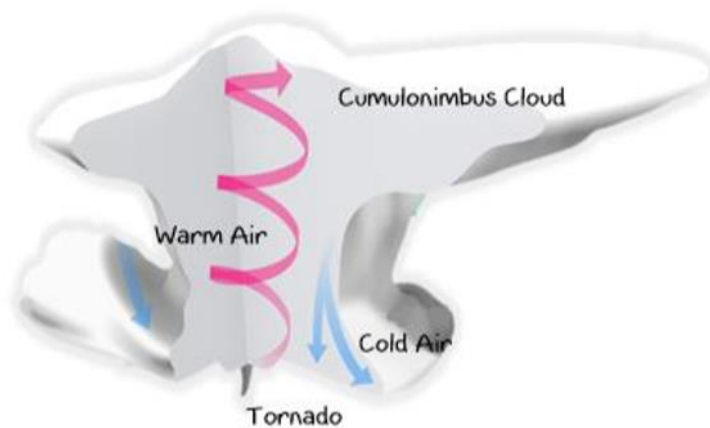


happen in the southern states of the US. The area where most tornadoes occur is called Tornado Alley. It is area through Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota.

Tornadoes

HOW THEY FORM

The formation of tornadoes is very complex. Scientists aren't sure of all the causes of these violent storms. What we do know is that they form from very tall thunderstorm clouds, which are called cumulonimbus clouds. But, this is not all. Certain other conditions must also be met for a tornado to form. There must be warm and moist winds lower down the atmosphere, and cool and dry winds higher up.



When the winds suddenly become stronger and change direction, an invisible horizontal spinning effect is created in the lower atmosphere. The warmer air near the surface pushes the rotating winds to a vertical position and a tornado is formed.

The southern and central part of the United States are very prone to tornadoes because of their unique geography. It is an area where hot and moist air from the Gulf of Mexico meets cold and dry air from Canada. The Rocky Mountains block humid air from moving eastward, which clears the way for the dry and cold air from Canada to flow to the south.



Dangerous

IN HISTORY

Although most tornadoes happen in the United States, the deadliest tornado occurred in Bangladesh. This violent tornado struck in 1989 and killed around 1,300 people.

The deadliest tornado that has ever been seen happened in the United States in 1925. The Tri-State Tornado killed 695 people and traveled 300 miles through the states of Missouri, Illinois and Indiana.



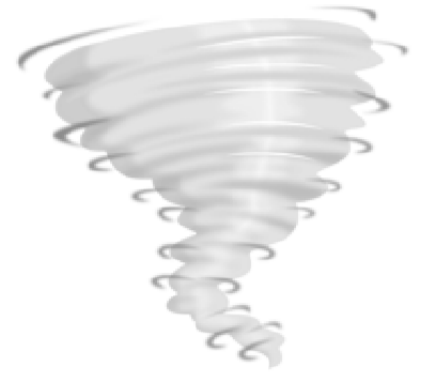
The deadliest and most destructive tornado in recent history happened in Missouri in 2011. The city of Joplin was hit by an extremely powerful tornado. Around 7,100 homes were destroyed and 158 people were killed.

The biggest tornado ever recorded occurred in 2013 near Oklahoma City. The tornado was wider than any other tornado ever observed. It reached a maximum width of 2.6 miles! Normally, tornadoes are less than half a mile wide.



Things to know

ABOUT TORNADOES



Not all tornadoes are visible. In fact, they can only be seen when they pick up dust, or when a cloud forms inside the funnel.

The strength of a tornado is measured by the Fujita Scale (F-Scale). The scale ranges from F0 to F5. Only the very powerful and destructive tornadoes are rated on this scale.

Most tornadoes in the United States occur in Texas. However, the most destructive storms happen in Oklahoma.

A tornado is also called a twister. When a tornado forms above water it is called a waterspout.

75% of all tornadoes in the world occur in the United States.

Thunderstorms that are likely to cause a tornado are called supercells.

Basements and underground areas are the safest places to hide during a tornado. It is also a good idea to stay away from windows.