

Tornadoes

Tornadoes go by many names. Cyclone. Twister. Funnel. Whatever the name, these storms are fierce natural disasters that can cause widespread damage.

What is a Tornado?

Tornadoes develop from thunderstorms. Not all thunderstorms are capable of creating a tornado, however. Scientists do not yet completely understand everything about how and why a tornado forms, but they do know that certain conditions must be present in order for a funnel cloud to develop.



Tornadoes need an unstable atmosphere in order to form. This instability is created by warm, moist air low to the ground that rises upwards. Tornadoes also need wind shear – a change in wind direction or wind speed – in order to form. If these conditions are present, then a funnel cloud could develop.

Once the funnel stretches from the storm above and touches the ground below, then it is considered a tornado. Funnels that don't reach the ground are not officially tornadoes.

Tornado Damage

The United States averages more than 1,000 tornadoes every year. Some of these tornadoes are weak and do not cause much damage. However, some tornadoes can be extremely violent, uprooting trees, tossing around cars, and leveling houses. Most of the damage is caused by strong winds and flying debris. These powerful storms can have wind speeds of more than 300 miles per hour!

Top 5 Most Deadly U.S. Tornadoes

Date of Tornado	State(s) Tornado Occurred In
March 18, 1925	Missouri, Illinois, Indiana
May 7, 1840	Louisiana, Mississippi
May 27, 1896	Missouri, Illinois
April 5, 1936	Mississippi
April 6, 1936	Georgia

TORNADO SAFETY

Tornados can develop very quickly, with little to no warning. Make sure your entire family knows what to do in case a tornado forms near you.

The safest place to be in case of a tornado is in a basement. If the building you live in doesn't have a basement, then you should go to the lowest level you can and find a room that has no windows, like a bathroom or closet.

Being in a car during a tornado is very risky. If you can, drive out of the tornado's path. If you can't get out of the tornado's path, however, do not try to outrun the tornado! Instead, get out of the car and try to find nearby shelter. If there is no shelter nearby, find a ditch and lie flat.