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HURRICANES AND TORNADOES: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Hurricanes and tornadoes both form in warm, damp air when winds blow into each other from opposite directions. Even though winds from the strongest tornadoes far exceed that from the strongest hurricanes, hurricanes typically cause much more damage individually and over a season.



MORE ARTICLES ON THIS TOPIC

Below is a fact sheet about the differences and similarities between hurricanes and tornadoes.

For emergency preparedness information head to:

- Tornado - Get Prepared
- Hurricane - Get Prepared

HURRICANE AND TORNADO FACTS

Hurricanes

- A hurricane is a tropical storm with sustained winds of 74 miles per hour or more.
- Hurricane winds blow in a large spiral around a relative calm center known as the "eye." The "eye" is generally 20 to 30 miles wide and the storm may extend outward 400 miles.
- Hurricanes last for several hours and can last for more than 2 weeks over open waters.
- A hurricane damages structures through storm surge, rainfall-caused flooding, as well as high wind impacts.
- The Atlantic Ocean hurricane season officially begins on June 1 of each year and continues until November 30.

Tornadoes

- A tornado is a violent windstorm characterized by a twisting, funnel-shaped cloud. It is usually spawned by a thunderstorm (or as a result of a hurricane).
- Winds swirl around in a spiral at 40-320 mph. In the middle is an eye of descending air, surrounded by a strong upward current. The average diameter of a tornado tends to be a mile or smaller.
- Most tornadoes last less than 10 minutes. However, some have been known to last over an hour.
- Damage is caused primarily from extreme winds and wind-blown debris.
- Tornado season is generally March through August. Also, over 80 percent of all tornadoes strike between noon and midnight.



**Car Accident?
Be prepared.**

Know what to do—find out here.

HURRICANE AND TORNADO WINDS

Below is a scale of hurricane and tornado wind speeds. Keep in mind that most tornadoes and their high winds last less than 10 minutes while hurricane winds are sustained and can last for hours.

Category - Fujita Scale Level

Category 0/F0 Wind Speed -- Hurricane is N/A, a Tornado is 40-72 mph

Category One/F1 Wind Speed -- Hurricane is 74-95 mph, a Tornado is 73-112 mph

Category Two/F2 Wind Speed -- Hurricane is 96-110 mph, a Tornado is 113-157 mph

Category Three/F3 Wind Speed -- Hurricane is 111-130 mph, a Tornado is 158-206 mph

Category Four/F4 Wind Speed -- Hurricane is 131-155 mph, a Tornado is 207-260 mph

Category Five/F5 Wind Speed -- Hurricane is 155 mph + , a Tornado is 261-320 mph

Source: National Weather Service

On February 2, 2006, the National Oceanic & Atmosphere Administration premiered the Enhanced Fujita (EF) scale, which went into effect in 2007. The original Fujita scale classified tornadoes based on damage to homes. The new EF scale classifies tornadoes by the Degree of Damage for different structures - mobile homes, offices, malls, etc. - as well as homes. Click here to learn more.

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