

# Earth's Most Destructive Storms

Imagine being in the path of a storm that causes winds to blow at least 74 miles per hour. Now add heavy rain, flooding, and a large wall of water 50 to 100 miles wide that stretches across the coastline. When these conditions are present, you know a hurricane is coming.



Hurricanes are severe storms with rotating winds. They usually form over the warm water in the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, and the Gulf of Mexico. In other parts of the world, these storms are called cyclones or typhoons.

Hurricanes build up heat and energy from contact with warm ocean waters. Clouds pull up the moisture and the air near the surface of the water. This creates a column of fast-moving air. As the strength and speed of the winds increase, the storm becomes a swirling mass of air, which rotates around the “eye,” or center of the storm.

Hurricanes affect people who live along the coast the most. Hurricanes gather strength while they are over water and then hit land with tremendous force. They bring huge waves, which can cause a storm surge. A storm surge is a buildup of water at the center of the storm. The ocean level rises one to three feet. Wind-driven water adds to the surge as the storm approaches the land. This water can drown the coastline.

Hurricanes weaken after they strike land, but they can still affect people who live hundreds of miles inland. Hurricanes bring heavy rain.

This can trigger mudslides and cause severe flooding. Hurricane-force winds can destroy buildings and tear loose signs, roofing material, and any items left outside. These items become like missiles. Some hurricanes can also produce tornadoes. Tornadoes increase the storm's destructive power.

Satellite technology has improved our ability to monitor and forecast hurricanes. Forecasters use this data to measure the strength of a hurricane. They can also more accurately predict which direction it may take. Authorities may order people to evacuate their homes. This usually happens to people who live in coastal or low-lying areas or in the direct path of the hurricane.

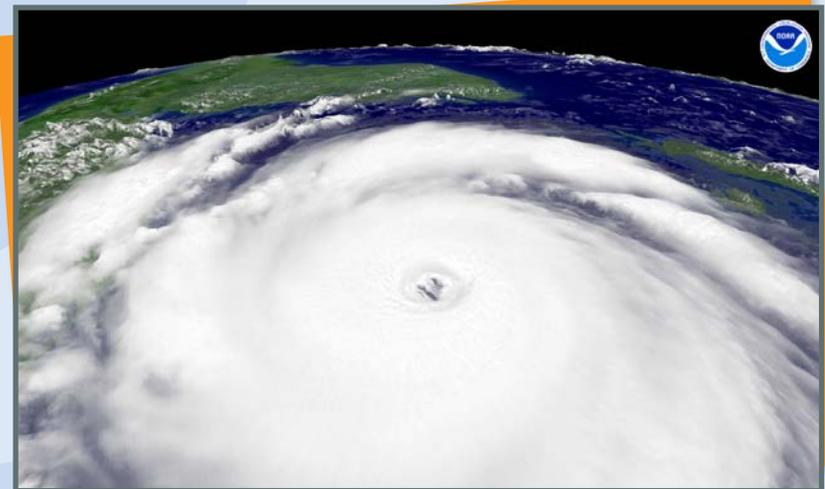
There are many things you can do to prepare for a hurricane. First, learn about your surroundings. Find out if your area could be affected by a storm surge or flooding. Identify anything that could pose a hazard during heavy rain or flood, such as a levee or dam. Identify hurricane evacuation routes. Find out how to reach higher ground. Make a family emergency kit and a communication plan.

There are things you can do to protect yourself from a hurricane. Secure your windows and place any outdoor objects inside. Stay indoors, away from windows and glass doors. Get information from your radio or TV. Wait inside until the storm ends.

Hurricanes are Earth's largest and most destructive storms. When you can't get out of their way, staying inside your home is the safest thing you can do.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Hurricanes and tornadoes both contain strong swirling winds and cause damage. However, hurricanes are usually much larger than tornadoes. Hurricanes often last days or even weeks, while tornadoes usually end after seconds or hours.



This 2007 satellite image shows Hurricane Dean heading for Mexico.