

Name: _____

10 Minutes with Science

The Tornado

The tornado is a violent mass of air that spins forming a column, with winds that can destroy everything in its path. Although tornadoes can take several forms, the most common is that of a funnel cloud, whose thin end touches the earth.



Tornadoes are known by the bottom end being in contact with the surface of the Earth, and the upper end is in contact with a stormy cloud. In addition, its duration is very short, usually lasting from only a few seconds to about an hour.

A tornado begins with a severe storm. When the steam condenses inside from the storm, it releases energy in the form of heat. If the air in the lower parts of the storm becomes hot enough, it will create a temperature difference with the cold of the upper parts of the storm. As a result, the heated air will tend to rise while cold air will tend to come down creating vertical air currents that begin to swirl and form a funnel. The air inside the funnel rotates faster and faster generating an area of very low pressure, which then draws more air into it, and causing a tornado to form.



More tornadoes occur the United States than anywhere else in the world. It is an area known as Tornado Alley, alley of the tornadoes, between the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachian Mountains.

The most destructive tornadoes have winds with speeds of over 450 kilometers per hour, can measure up to 2 kilometers wide, and destroy everything in its path along more than

100 kilometers of travel. One very destructive tornado did not follow the typical duration of a tornado was the Tri-State tornado of 1925, which lasted more than three hours, traveled 352 kilometers and caused 695 deaths.