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Hurricanes: Nature's Wildest Storms

by Erin Ryan

You may already know that hurricanes are major tropical storms that can cause devastating waves, wind, and rain. They happen during "Hurricane Season," which is from June 1st until November 30th in the Atlantic Ocean and from May 15th until November 30th in the Pacific Ocean. A hurricane that forms in the Atlantic Ocean begins as tropical disturbance. This is a large area of windy thunderstorms that forms over the warm ocean, near the equator. When the storms grow larger, rains and wind pick up, and the "disturbance" can develop into a full-fledged hurricane.



Stages of a Hurricane: Simple Storms Grow Into Giants

A storm progresses through four different stages before it is actually considered a hurricane. First is a tropical disturbance, which has thunderstorms and rotating winds, or what scientists call cyclonic circulation. Next is a tropical depression, which is similar to a tropical disturbance, but has winds between 23 and 39 miles per hour. A tropical storm is the next level, which has stronger wind speeds between 40 and 73 miles per hour. Once winds reach 74 miles per hour, the storm is officially classified as a hurricane. The winds pick up energy from the warm surface ocean water.

Hurricanes rotate counterclockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere. Hurricanes can vary in size and can grow to have a diameter of up to 600 miles, which is longer than the entire state of Florida!

As a hurricane crosses over land, it begins to dissipate, or break apart and reduce in strength. This is because it is no longer over the warm ocean water that it needs for energy. At this point, a hurricane can still cause a lot of damage because of high winds, rain, and flooding, but unless it makes its way back over the open ocean, it is downgraded from a hurricane back to a tropical storm.

Hurricane Dangers



When a hurricane makes landfall, it can be very dangerous along coastlines because of a storm surge, where ocean waters rush onto land. When this is combined with heavy rainfall, there can be devastating floods.

The center of a hurricane is called the eye. While most of a hurricane contains dangerously strong winds, the eye is actually a calm area in the storm. When the eye of a hurricane passes over land, people might think that it's over, but before long the wind and rain increase again as the second part of the hurricane moves through.