A tornado is a spinning tube of wind. It goes from the top of a thunderstorm to the ground. A tornado can be hard to see. You usually can only see a tornado if it has water, dust and small pieces of junk. Tornadoes are the most violent storms.

Tornadoes happen in many parts of the world. Even New Zealand has about 20 tornadoes each year. Argentina and Bangladesh have the most tornadoes other than the United States. About 1,200 tornadoes hit the U.S. each year.

When and where are tornadoes most likely?

Tornado season is the time of year with the most tornadoes. They hit from May to July. Tornadoes can happen at any time of year, though. They can take place at any time of day or night. Most tornadoes occur between 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. There is a big area called Tornado Alley that gets many tornadoes. It goes through parts of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Ohio and Iowa. Illinois, Florida and Alabama also get tornadoes.
What is the difference between a Tornado WATCH and a Tornado WARNING?

A Tornado WATCH means the weather is right for a tornado. A watch can cover parts of one state. It can also cover several states.

A Tornado WARNING means a tornado has been seen. It can be very dangerous. A warning can cover several counties.

How is tornado strength rated?

Meteorologists measure how strong a tornado is. They look at the amount of damage. From that, they figure out how fast the wind was blowing. The Enhanced Fujita Scale looks at 28 signs of damage. These include what kind of building is damaged, how it was built and damage to trees.

How do tornadoes form?

We don't completely understand tornadoes. The worst ones come from supercells. These are spinning thunderstorms. Scientists think that tornadoes form because there are different temperatures in a storm.
What is the difference between supercell and non-supercell tornadoes?

The most common tornado comes from a supercell thunderstorm. They are often the most dangerous. They spin and move upward. There are many ideas about how a tornado starts to spin. One idea is about wind shear. This is when wind blows at different heights in the air. They begin to blow at different speeds or in different directions. Then, if there is warm, moist air at ground level, it will give the storm energy. The storm feeds off the warm, wet air. Then a tornado can form.

The other kind is non-supercell tornadoes. They form from spinning air close to the ground. One non-supercell tornado is called the gustnado. It does not start in a thunderstorm. It is a whirl of dust along the ground. Another non-supercell tornado is a landspout. It has a narrow tube and looks like a rope. It forms while the thunderstorm cloud is still growing. Waterspouts are like landspouts. They are over water and usually cause less damage.

What do storm spotters look for when trying to identify a tornado or a dangerous storm?

Storm spotters will look for special kinds of clouds. They show that a tornado is likely to happen. One of these clouds is called inflow bands. Another is the beaver's tail. It is a smooth, flat cloud.

A wall cloud is at the bottom of a thunderstorm. It exists for 10 to 20 minutes before a tornado appears.