

What is a Hurricane?

A hurricane is a type of tropical cyclone, which is a generic term for a low pressure system that generally forms in the tropics. The cyclone is accompanied by thunderstorms and, in the Northern Hemisphere, a counterclockwise circulation of winds near the earth's surface. Tropical cyclones are classified as follows:

- **Tropical Depression**
An organized system of clouds and thunderstorms with a defined surface circulation and maximum sustained winds of 38 mph or less.
- **Tropical Storm**
An organized system of strong thunderstorms with a defined surface circulation and maximum sustained winds of 39-73 mph.
- **Hurricane**
An intense tropical weather system of strong thunderstorms with a well-defined surface circulation and maximum sustained winds of 74 mph or higher.

Hurricane Classification

Hurricanes are classified into five categories, based on their wind speeds and potential to cause damage.

- Category One -- Winds 74-95 miles per hour
- Category Two -- Winds 96-110 miles per hour
- Category Three -- Winds 111-130 miles per hour
- Category Four -- Winds 131-155 miles per hour
- Category Five -- Winds greater than 155 miles per hour

In the U.S., the official hurricane season is from June 1 to November 30, but hurricanes can happen any time of the year.

Watch vs. Warning – Know the Difference

A **HURRICANE WATCH** issued for your part of the coast indicates the possibility that you could experience hurricane conditions within 36 hours. This watch should trigger your family's disaster plan, and protective measures should be initiated, especially those actions that require extra time such as securing a boat, leaving a barrier island, etc.

A **HURRICANE WARNING** issued for your part of the coast indicates that sustained winds of at least 74 mph are expected within 24 hours or less. Once this warning has been issued, your family should be in the process of completing protective actions and deciding the safest location to be during the storm.