

Tennessee averages about 12 tornadoes each year, resulting in an average of 3 fatalities. East Tennessee alone averages about 3 tornadoes each year. Our peak season for tornadoes is March, April and May, and is most likely to occur between 3 and 9 PM. A secondary maximum of tornadoes will occur in November and December of which we have a very sad reminder this past November 10th.

Meteorologists rate the intensity of a tornado on the F scale or Fujita scale. This scale was developed in the early 1970s by Dr. Theodore Fujita. There are six levels of intensity starting with F0 being the weakest and F4 being the strongest. The wind speeds in a tornado can range as low as 40 mph (F0) and reach in excess of 300 mph (F5).

No place is immune to tornadoes. Tornadoes have been known to occur at all hours of the day or night and at any time of the year.

Every state, in the United States, has reported a tornado. Even Yellowstone National Park had a tornado at an altitude of 10,000 feet on July 21, 1987. This F4 tornado had a path length of 24 miles and a path width of 1.4 miles. 15,000 acres of trees were downed. Mountains and hills do not protect you from tornadoes.

The average tornado moves from southwest to northeast, but tornadoes have been known to move in any direction. The average forward speed is 30 mph, but vary from nearly stationary to 70 mph.

The "Tri-state Tornado" on March 18, 1925 was one of the worst tornadoes on record. This F5 tornado had a path length of 219 miles, had an average forward speed of 62 mph and was on the ground for about 3 1/2 hours. The tornado started in southeast Missouri, roared through southern Illinois and ended in southwest Indiana. There were 695 deaths. 234 deaths occurred in Murphysboro, IL, which made it the largest death toll within a single city, in U.S. history.

A listing of tornadoes, by state, can be found at the website of the National Climatic Data Center at www.ncdc.noaa.gov/

Fujita Intensity Scale (F Scale)

This scale is named after Dr. T. Fujita, the noted meteorologist who has studied tornadoes extensively and classified the damage created by these storms.

F0 (weak)..... 40-72 mph.....Light damage...shallow rooted trees pushed over.
F1 (weak)..... 73-112 mph.....Moderate damage...mobile homes overturned; roof surfaces peeled off.
F2 (strong).....113-157 mph.....Considerable damage...large trees uprooted...mobile homes destroyed
F3 (strong)..... 158-206 mph.....Severe damage. Trains overturned; well built homes lose roofs and walls
F4 (violent)..... 207-260 mph.....Devastating damage. Well built homes leveled; cars tossed about
F5 (violent)..... 261-318 mph.....Incredible damage...well built homes disintegrate; cars thrown more than 300 feet