



MIAMI-SOUTH FLORIDA
National Weather Service
Forecast Office
<http://www.weather.gov/miami>



Tornado in Everglades of Collier County on June 24th, 2012 (courtesy Dan Floyd)

2016 Severe Weather Awareness Week

Wednesday, February 24th is Tornado and Thunderstorm Awareness Day

Tornadoes and severe thunderstorms are more frequent in South Florida than some people realize. Since 1950, south Florida has averaged seven (8) reported tornadoes per year. Since 1996, 14 tornadoes of EF-1 or EF-2 intensity on the Enhanced Fujita Scale (winds greater than 85 mph) have affected south Florida. South Florida tornadoes occur with a variety of weather systems, from strong winter/spring cold fronts to waterspouts

moving onshore to tornadoes embedded in the outer rain bands of tropical storms and hurricanes.

A total of 9 tornadoes were reported in south Florida in 2015, all rated at EF-0 except for the West Boca tornado of February 5th which was an EF-1.

So far in 2016, the strong El Niño pattern has contributed to a very active severe weather season, with a total of 6 tornadoes and at least three of them EF-1. These include the Pompano Beach and northeast Miami-Dade County tornadoes of February 16th as well as the Coconut Creek/Pompano Beach tornado of January 27th. Other confirmed tornadoes so far in 2016 have occurred in Moore Haven, Davie and southern metro Palm Beach County.

Most south Florida tornadoes fall in the EF0 and EF1 category, which translates to winds less than 110 mph. Impacts from these tornadoes include: uprooted trees/broken tree branches, downed power lines, minor roof damage except for mobile homes and patio/pool screen enclosures. Nevertheless, a total of 6 injuries from tornadoes have been noted in 2015 and so far in 2016, which is a sign that ANY tornado is dangerous.

Even waterspouts can be dangerous to boaters as well as to those at the beach. On May 25th, 2015, a waterspout moved onshore Fort Lauderdale Beach and flipped a bounce house in the air about 30 feet. Four children were in the bounce house at the time and sustained injuries.



NWS Storm Survey picture from northeast Miami-Dade County on February 16, 2016

Tornadoes have occurred in every month in south Florida, but occur mostly from May to August when thunderstorms are most frequent. Most south Florida tornadoes are relatively small and short-lived. This means that it is very difficult to give plenty of advance warning. In many cases, only a few minutes of warning are given between the time a warning is issued by the National Weather Service and the tornado touchdown. Nevertheless, even a few minutes of warning can make the difference between life and death. Having a NOAA Weather Radio is a critical component of the warning system. Having a weather radio available to alert of an approaching tornado has saved lives. Local media will also relay tornado warnings via the Emergency Alert System (EAS). There are also many mobile services available to alert of tornadoes, including [Wireless Emergency Alerts](#) (WEA) which allows customers who own certain wireless phone models and other enabled mobile devices to receive geographically-targeted, text-like messages alerting them of imminent threats to safety, such as tornado warnings, in their area.

It is important to understand the meaning of the terminology meteorologists use to assess the threat of tornadoes in your community. A **Tornado Watch** means that atmospheric conditions are conducive for tornadoes. Remain alert for approaching storms. A **Tornado Warning** means that a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. If a tornado warning is issued for your area, **move immediately to your pre-designated place of safety.**

IMPORTANT TORNADO SAFETY TIP: When a tornado warning is issued for your area, stay inside and go to an interior room without windows. In a multi-story building, go to the lowest floor.

Severe thunderstorms are also fairly common in south Florida. These are defined as thunderstorms containing wind speeds of at least 58 mph and/or large hail of at least one inch in diameter. Severe thunderstorms can occur year-round but are most common from May to August. Winds in excess of 58 mph can cause damage to trees, cause signs to fly through the air, knock down power lines and even cause structural damage to buildings. Large hail, although usually not damaging in south Florida, can still pose a threat, especially in urban areas.

Tornado and Severe Thunderstorm warnings are normally issued within 30 minutes of an expected impact, and people are urged to take immediate protective action due to the imminent nature of the threat.

For more information on tornadoes and thunderstorms, including safety information, visit the [National Weather Service's Severe Weather website](#).

Make sure to visit our website at weather.gov/southflorida for the latest weather information, including information on potential tornado and thunderstorm threats, watches and warnings. Also monitor NOAA Weather Radio and local media, particularly during potentially threatening weather days.