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Did You Know?

Hurricanes have at least 74 mph winds. If the winds are under 74 mph, the hurricane is considered a tropical storm.

Key Terms

meteorologist—a specialist who reports, predicts, and studies the weather

storm surge—a mountain of water that occurs when a storm sucks up water from the ocean

tropical cyclone—a severe tropical storm with strong winds moving around a low-pressure center

CHAPTER 1 | Introduction

Bad weather happens all the time. Rain may spoil a picnic or ball game. Or it may be too cold and icy to play outside. Thunder and lightning can be frightening.

Most of the time, bad weather is just annoying. Sometimes, though, bad weather can be dangerous.

Storms can be killers. Many natural disasters are caused by bad weather. Strong winds can tear roofs off houses.

Trees can be ripped from the ground and tossed into the air. Cars and buses may be blown off the road. Heavy rains cause flooding. Bad floods can wash away entire villages. A storm at sea puts boats and sailors at risk.

Watching the Weather

Scientists who study the weather are called meteorologists. Many of them use computers and pictures from outer space to do their job.

They track storms and share their information with each other. Meteorologists can't control the weather, but they can often tell when and where a storm will strike.

Many people listen to weather reports on the radio. Television news programs include reports on the weather, too. Weather reports can be lifesavers. They warn people of bad storms heading their way. This gives people time to go somewhere safe to wait out the storm.

Tropical Storms

Tropical storms kill many thousands of people all over the world. These powerful storms begin in the warm ocean waters near the equator. The most severe tropical storms are called tropical cyclones.

Most tropical storms stay out at sea. Boats and ships may be at risk from these storms, but in general they cause very little damage. However, when a strong tropical storm strikes land, it can be a disaster.

Huge waves crash onto the shore. The storm sucks up water from the ocean. This mountain of water is called a storm surge. When the storm hits land, it brings this water with it. A storm surge can flood land near the coast. This is often the storm's biggest killer.